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走近埃及神话

Egyptian Myth

A Very Short Introduction

Geraldine Pinch 著

邢颖 译

外语教学与研究出版社

FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND RESEARCH PRESS

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走近埃及神话

古埃及的神话复杂而神秘。著名的方尖碑、图坦卡蒙镀金小雕像、讲述诸神不端行为的故事……这些都代表着什么？人们是如何解释它们的？本书作者以全新的视角、深入浅出的文字介绍了埃及神话中核心的人物和故事，概括、分析了埃及神话特有的结构和特点，揭示了埃及神话与古埃及文明之间的密切关系。

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Introduction

In the late 4th millennium BC, the valley and delta of the River Nile were formed into the twin kingdoms of Upper and Lower Egypt. Over the next 3,000 years Egypt was ruled by 32 dynasties of kings (see the timeline at the end of this book). One title for an Egyptian king was Pharaoh (meaning 'Great House'), and so this great span of time is often known as the Pharaonic Period.

For much of the 3rd and 2nd millennia BC, Egypt was the wealthiest and most powerful nation in the Ancient Near East. The Egyptians were pioneers of monumental stone architecture. They produced magnificent sculpture and painted reliefs, and invented the hieroglyphic script, one of the world's earliest and most beautiful forms of writing. Even after Egypt lost its political independence in the late 1st millennium BC, its culture and religion survived to influence those of Greece and Rome.

Mythology was an integral part of Egyptian culture for much of its timespan. Characters and events from myth permeate Egyptian art, architecture, and literature. Myths underpinned many of the rituals performed by kings and priests. Educated Egyptians believed that a knowledge of myth was an essential weapon in the fight to survive the dangers of life and the afterlife.

There is disagreement among Egyptologists about when mythical narratives first developed in Egypt. This dispute is partly due to the

difficulty of deciding what should be counted as a myth. Today, the term myth is often used in a negative way to refer to something that is exaggerated or untrue. In ancient cultures, myth did not have this negative connotation; myths could be regarded as stories that contained poetic rather than literal truths. Some scholars separate myths from other types of traditional tale by classifying them as stories featuring deities. This simple definition might work quite well for Egypt, but not for all cultures.

Myths are generally set in a remote time or place where humans and deities can interact. They are stories imbued with meaning and power. Myths could be used to explain or justify the way the world is. Even in modern times we acknowledge that a myth can take on a life of its own and become more influential than the original facts on which it was based. For the Egyptians, myths had the power to transcend individual experience and act as a bridge between the human and divine worlds.

Egyptian mythology never solidified into one standard version. It continued to change and develop over 3,000 years. The chief deities of regional temples generated their own myths. The basic events, which might be described as 'core myths' (see Box 1 in Chapter 1), were constantly retold and given many different actors and settings.

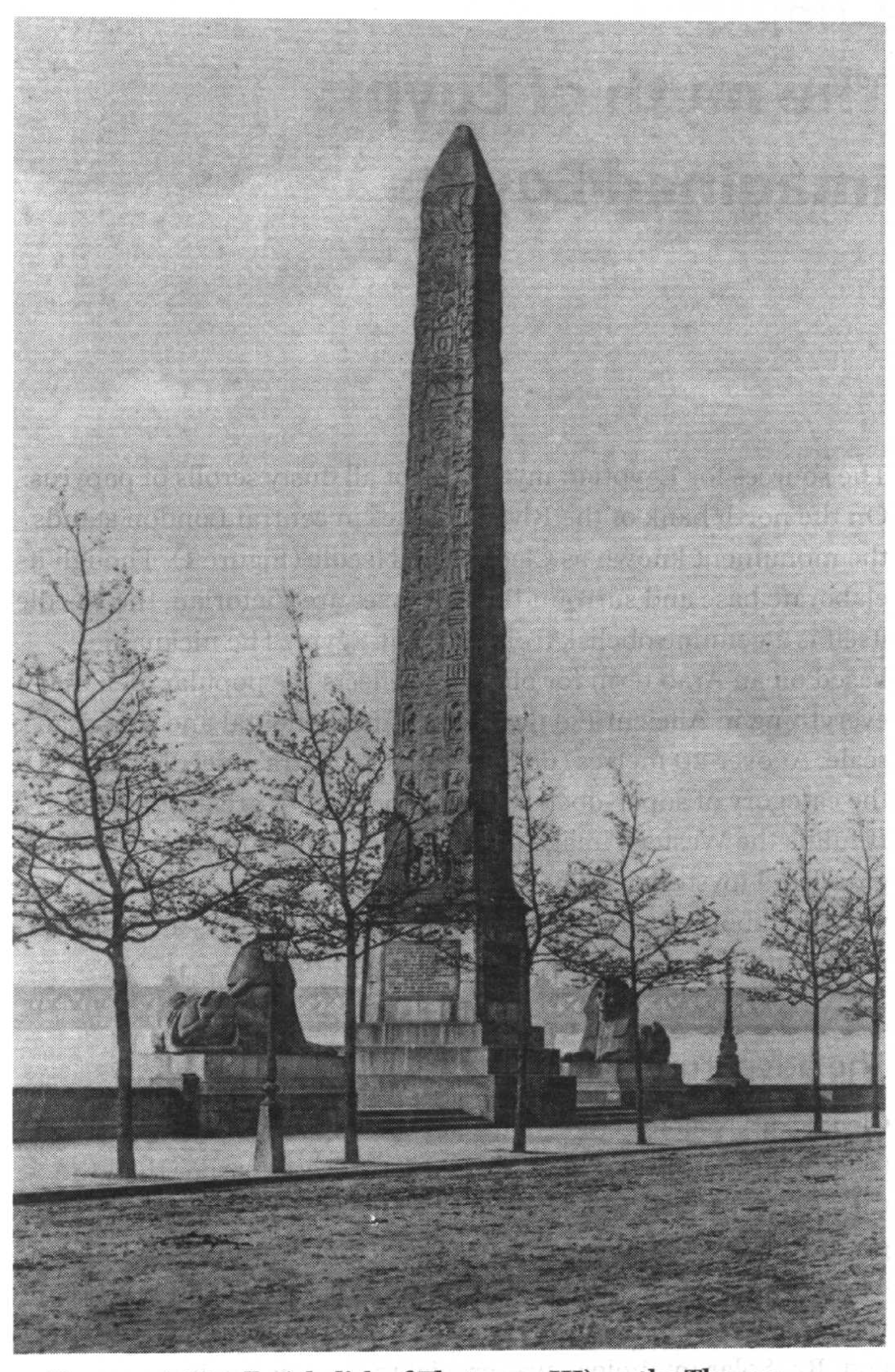
This book is arranged thematically, with each theme illustrated by a particular Ancient Egyptian artefact. These artefacts have been chosen to emphasize the diversity of the source material that Egyptologists work from. Hopefully, the objects will serve as access points to a culture that can seem very alien to the modern Western mindset. I shall not pretend that everything about Egyptian myth can be made simple. The complexity of this subject is what makes it endlessly fascinating to study.

Chapter 1
The myth of Egypt: imagined Egypts

The sources for Egyptian myth are not all dusty scrolls of papyrus. On the north bank of the River Thames in central London stands the monument known as Cleopatra's Needle (Figure 1). Though its elaborate base and surrounding sphinxes are Victorian, the 'needle' itself is a genuine obelisk from Ancient Egypt. The nickname, based on an Arab term for obelisks, reflects the popular idea that everything in Ancient Egypt was on a monumental and inhuman scale. At over 20 metres (68 feet) tall, Cleopatra's Needle belongs to the category of super-obelisks made for Egypt's greatest temples.[1] It fulfils the Western image of Egyptian architecture by being both grand and mysterious. The Egyptians had a gift for creating striking visual symbols to convey complex ideas. An obelisk is a sculptural representation of a mythological place and time.

The adventures of an obelisk

Cleopatra's Needle actually dates to the reign of King Thutmose III (*c.*1479–1425 BC), who lived around 1,400 years earlier than the Cleopatra everyone has heard of (Cleopatra VII). Thutmose's granite obelisk was one of a pair quarried in Aswan and floated 400 miles down the Nile to Heliopolis ('City of the Sun'). The pair were made to stand at the entrance to the great temple of the sun god, Ra. Solar mythology was crucial to Egyptian culture, so this was one of Egypt's most important temples. The priests of



1. Cleopatra's Needle (obelisk of Thutmose III) on the Thames embankment

Heliopolis were renowned in the ancient world for their knowledge and wisdom. Many of the myths discussed in this book may have originated in Heliopolis. The temple of Ra was later plundered to build Cairo. Its scant remains now lie under a modern suburb and the city's airport. Cleopatra's Needle is a sad reminder of how much of Egypt's heritage has been lost or displaced and how difficult it is to piece together the scattered remains.

By erecting these obelisks in Heliopolis, Thutmose III was carrying out one of the main functions of an Egyptian king. That function was to facilitate the daily cycle in which the sun god was thought to renew the universe. The tips of the obelisks were covered with an alloy of gold with silver, called electrum. The structures would have been sited so that the sun lit them up every morning. Together, the obelisks represented the place of renewal, the mountains of the horizon. Cleopatra's Needle is the western horizon, the place of sunset and death. The other obelisk of the pair is the eastern horizon, the place of dawn and rebirth. Like most Egyptian symbols, obelisks can represent more than one thing simultaneously. Individual obelisks also stood for the primeval mound, the place of the very first sunrise at the dawn of creation. They acted as markers of mythological time. The role of these obelisks as elements in a working model of the cosmos was obscured by their subsequent history.

In the 13th century BC, the famous ruler Ramesses II inscribed his name on the obelisks. They may have been moved to the Nile Delta at this time to stand in one of the temples he built or enlarged there. By the 1st century BC they were in Alexandria, the capital city of the Ptolemy dynasty, of which Cleopatra VII was the last representative. Alexandria was the intellectual hub of the Hellenistic world; a centre for science and philosophy. The presence of obelisks was a reminder of more elusive forms of knowledge which could not be tested by experiment or attained by rational

argument. An inscription shows that the obelisks were re-erected under Cleopatra's nemesis, the Emperor Augustus, outside a temple dedicated to the cult of Julius Caesar. Eventually, one of Alexandria's frequent earthquakes toppled the western obelisk.

This obelisk was offered to Britain by a Turkish governor after the British had defeated Napoleon's army at the Battle of Alexandria in AD 1801. Cleopatra's Needle remained an uncollected present until AD 1877, when it was transported to Britain on the barge 'Cleopatra', with the loss of six lives on route. The successful erection of the obelisk on the Thames embankment inspired envy in America. So the other obelisk of the pair was transported to New York and erected in Central Park in AD 1881. Parted by an ocean, the function and meaning of Thutmose III's obelisks were lost. This was a fate shared by many Egyptian obelisks, but new meanings were assigned to them in new contexts. The first Egyptian obelisks had been moved to Europe in the reign of Augustus. They were used to adorn various monuments, including his tomb. This encouraged the idea that obelisks were principally monuments to the dead. In recent centuries, obelisks have frequently been used to mark tombs or commemorate war dead. Ancient Egypt has often been branded as a society obsessed with death, but Egyptian thought was not morbid. In their original setting, the obelisks celebrated the victory of life over death.

Secret wisdom

Obelisks are usually inscribed in the type of Egyptian writing known as hieroglyphs. By the end of the 4th century AD, there were very few people left who could understand the hieroglyphic script. Around this time an Egyptian named Horapollo wrote a treatise that popularized the idea that the hieroglyphic signs were an esoteric symbolic language which concealed great religious truths. As early as the 1st century AD, the Roman author Pliny the Elder had asserted that the Egyptians inscribed their most secret

knowledge on obelisks. This knowledge was said to be nothing less than the nature of the universe and the meaning of life. The belief that the Egyptians possessed this secret is the primary myth about Ancient Egypt.

When Egypt became a Christian country in the 4th century AD, the 'pagan' culture of the Pharaonic past was rejected. In the Hebrew books of the Old Testament the polytheism of the Egyptians was contrasted unfavourably with the monotheism of the Jews. Early Christians continued to believe in the existence of pagan deities but downgraded them to the status of demons. The violence and sexuality of some of the myths told about Egyptian deities were used to support this view.

The Muslim Arabs who conquered Egypt in the 7th century AD were also hostile towards Ancient Egyptian religion. Arab scholars interested in alchemy did preserve some examples of the texts known as the Hermetica. These were produced in Egypt during the Graeco-Roman Period and are mainly written in Greek. They claimed to be the secret teachings of the great sage Hermes Trismegistus, a figure partially derived from Thoth, the Egyptian god of wisdom. The Hermetica mix Greek philosophy with Egyptian myth and give allegorical significance to magical and alchemic practices. They promise the secret of immortality to initiates who follow the teachings of Hermes.

Renaissance and Enlightenment

The great rediscovery of Classical learning in the Renaissance period made some information about Egyptian myth available. From the 6th century BC onwards, many famous Greek authors had written respectfully about Egyptian religion. The philosopher Plato credited Thoth with the invention of writing, mathematics, and astronomy. The myth of Atlantis, related by Plato in his dialogue *Timaeus* (*c.*348 BC), is attributed to a wise Egyptian priest who knew about a whole series of destructions going back to the early

days of the universe. Later Classical tradition claimed that most of the great philosophers had studied at Heliopolis or other Egyptian religious centres.

The historian and philosopher Plutarch probably did visit Egypt during the 1st century AD. His book *Concerning Isis and Osiris* retells and interprets many myths about this important pair of deities. Sources like these gave rise to the habit of perceiving Egypt through Greek or Roman eyes. This has been particularly damaging for the study of Egyptian myth. Whatever the links between them, Greek and Egyptian mythology were very different in scope and function.

Renaissance scholars wrongly believed that the Hermetica were much older than the works of philosophers such as Pythagoras, Plato, and Aristotle. The Hermetica were thought to expound the most ancient and natural form of religion. One manifestation of a growing discontent with the corruption and brutality of the established Christian church was a desire to return to this lost golden age of religious thought. By the 17th century AD, scholarship had proved that the Hermetica were not in fact immeasurably ancient, but many still believed that primeval wisdom was concealed in the undeciphered hieroglyphic texts on Egyptian objects brought to the West. Secret societies such as the Rosicrucians and the Freemasons used Egyptian symbolism to lend a spurious antiquity to their beliefs and practices. Egyptian wisdom became associated with radical and anti-establishment groups, such as the leaders of the French Revolution, who replaced the hated Bastille prison with a 'Fountain of Regeneration' surmounted by an Egyptian goddess, and the founding fathers of America. Traces of the latter link still survive in the pyramid on the Great Seal shown on dollar notes and in the Washington Monument, the world's largest obelisk.

Egypt became more accessible to foreigners in the late 18th century AD, and large numbers of Egyptian antiquities were sent to

Europe. Pioneering scholars, such as those who accompanied Napoleon to Egypt, published illustrated accounts of ancient temples and tombs. Egyptian sculpture and painting became major influences on the decorative arts in Europe and America. The race to decipher Egyptian hieroglyphs was one of the great intellectual challenges of the early 19th century. Evangelical Christians hoped that Egyptian inscriptions would provide independent confirmation of events in the Bible. Proponents of the Enlightenment hoped that the same inscriptions would reveal an ancient philosophy to set against Christianity. Neither group was destined to be satisfied.

Decipherment and disillusion

Royal names inscribed on obelisks were among the first words written in hieroglyphs to be deciphered. Scholars of many nationalities played a role in the decipherment, but it was the brilliant French linguist Jean-François Champollion who made the greatest contribution. He laid the foundations for understanding the grammar of Ancient Egyptian as well as the scripts in which it was written. During the second half of the 19th century, huge numbers of Egyptian texts were translated into European languages for the first time.

It soon became clear that Ancient Egyptian religion had not been centred on a single holy book comparable with the Bible or the Koran. There were plenty of hymns and formulaic prayers but few texts that Europeans would classify as theology or philosophy. The vast majority of temple inscriptions proved to be about kings making standard offerings to gods. No collection of national myths and few long narratives of any kind were recovered. Such mythical narratives as did survive were mainly embedded in collections of funerary texts aimed at easing the transition into the afterlife or in magical spells for use in daily life. A relatively small number of mythical themes occurred over and over again in such sources (see Box 1).

Box 1

CORE MYTHS

Creator comes into being in the *nun* (primeval ocean)

First land (primeval mound) rises from the *nun*

Emergence of the sun god/birth of the solar child/first sunrise

Solar child is threatened by forces of chaos and saved by protective deities

Creation of living beings via the bodily fluids/thoughts/words/hands of the creator

Humanity springs from tears of angry Eye of Ra

Separation of earth god and sky goddess by air god

Creation of Egypt as part of the divine order

Continuing war between *isfet* (chaos) and *maat* (order)

The creator sun god loses his eye/daughter/defender, but she is persuaded to return

Rebellions by gods and people cause the sun god to destroy most of humanity and leave earth for heaven

Osiris, ruler of Egypt, is murdered by his brother Seth

The sisters of Osiris (Isis and Nephthys) search for his mutilated body

Isis revives the body of Osiris to conceive a son, Horus

The body of Osiris is mummified and protected from attacks by Seth

The divine mother gives birth to Horus in the marshes

The infant Horus is poisoned by chaos creatures and then healed

Horus and Seth fight for the right to rule

Seth is wounded in the testicles and Horus loses his eye/eyes
The damaged eye of Horus is restored by another deity, usually Thoth
Horus avenges his father; Seth is defeated or pacified
Horus becomes king of the living; Osiris becomes judge of the dead and ruler of the underworld

The sun god enters the underworld each night
Deities and spirits defend the body of the sun god against the chaos monster Apophis
The sun god unites with Osiris to raise the dead
The sun god emerges at dawn to renew creation

The creator grows weary and returns to the primeval ocean
World returns to chaos

Academics argue ferociously about what kind of stories myths are but usually agree that they are stories. In Egyptian art and literature individual mythical events, such as 'goddess gives birth to marvellous child', are often found on their own. Many different terms for these story elements or motifs are in use, such as mythemes, mythical statements, monomyths, and genotext. Much of this book will deal with mythemes rather than mythical narratives because mythemes are what anyone studying Egyptian culture will mainly encounter.

The difficulty of detaching Egyptian myth from its cultural context made it relatively unattractive to the 19th-century thinkers who were developing universal theories of myth. The exception was the school who saw myths as evolving to explain ancient rituals and customs, but they were mainly concerned with tracing the 'primitive' origins of myths. They had little interest in looking at

how the myths functioned when Egyptian civilization was at its height.

Mystical and occult sects such as the Theosophical Society and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn enthusiastically added Egyptian myth and magic to their hotchpotch of beliefs. This may be one reason why many Egyptologists trained in the late 19th and early 20th centuries AD treated Egyptian religion with disdain. Far from being pure and sublime, it was seen as intellectually inferior to monotheism and tainted with the 'cancer' of magic. The Egyptian priesthood, so admired by the Ancient Greeks, was condemned for performing pointless rituals and meddling in politics. Some Egyptian myths were regarded as embarrassingly crude because of their sexual content. The inscription on Cleopatra's Needle links the king who dedicated the obelisk with the god Ra-Atum who was said to have created the first life by masturbating and taking his semen into his mouth. Because of this myth, obelisks could be associated with the erect penis of the creator. No wonder Sigmund Freud collected Egyptian religious art!

Sir Alan Gardiner, author of the standard work on Egyptian grammar, remarked that some of the religious texts that he translated '..must appear to the modern mind as unmitigated rubbish'.[2] When he and his colleagues were accused of being 'unsympathetic and patronising towards the myths and religious practices of Pharaonic times', he replied that this was better than 'regarding priestly writings with respectful awe' simply because they came from Ancient Egypt.

In more recent times, Egyptologists have striven to treat Egyptian religion in a non-judgemental way. Cultural relativism, and the fact that religion no longer holds a central place in many people's lives, have encouraged this approach. In Continental Europe, mythology is still taken seriously as a key to the human mind. The tendency among Continental writers to concentrate on arguing about definitions and terminology can be off-putting to the general reader.

In the English-speaking world comparatively few Egyptologists now specialize in religion and myth. The current emphasis on studying the daily life of ordinary people is partly responsible for this. The art, architecture, and literature of 'high culture' are routinely dismissed as elitest. The methods by which obelisks were constructed and the people who erected them are more likely to be studied than the significance of obelisks in religion or myth.

Why study Egyptian myth?

The science of archaeology has replaced the aim of learning from the past with the aim of learning about it. All the objects and texts recovered by archaeology are now deemed to be of equal interest, though this is not the way that most intelligent people treat objects and texts of their own era. Myths were the products of Ancient Egypt's most original minds and deepest thinkers. This book will make no apology for believing that a reason to be interested in them. Egyptian myths articulate the core values of the first great nation-state and one of the longest-lasting civilizations in the history of our planet.

Myths helped people of all ranks to explore their mental world, resolve crises, and endure the contradictions of life. What the Egyptians thought and hoped and dreamed are surely at least as important as what they ate or wore. Myths are a valuable source of information on national preoccupations. To take just one example, the stories in which deities have to argue their cases before a divine tribunal demonstrate how important the concept of justice was in Egyptian society.

Myth was one of the elements of Egyptian culture that most impressed and influenced contemporary civilizations. Stories and symbols crossed national boundaries and were reinterpreted to suit their new settings. The mythology of Isis and Osiris gave rise to an international cult which was Christianity's main rival under the Roman Empire. Via Greece and Rome, Egyptian myth became part

of Europe and America's cultural history, featuring in such diverse works as the poetry of Milton, an opera by Mozart, and the novels of Thomas Mann.

In the 21st century AD, more and more people are turning to the pagan past for spiritual inspiration. Among such seekers, mythical Egypt is a landscape of pyramids and obelisks, sphinxes and animal-headed deities, lost tombs and reanimated mummies. To find out how accurate this picture is, we must go back to the words of the Egyptians themselves.

Chapter 2

Divine words: language and myth

Our knowledge of Egyptian mythology has to be put together like a jigsaw puzzle. The pieces consist of hundreds of written and visual sources of many different dates. To make matters more complex, these sources are written in a variety of scripts and languages. Egyptologists recognize five main stages of the Egyptian language, and the Egyptians themselves devised four different scripts in which their language could be written (see Box 2). By far the best known of these is the hieroglyphic script which the Egyptians called *mdw nṯrw* – 'divine words'. The word *twt* 'image' could be used for an individual hieroglyph or for a cult statue. Both were thought of as potentially alive.

Box 2

LANGUAGES AND SCRIPTS USED IN ANCIENT EGYPT

4th millennium BC

Spoken and written language: Old Egyptian

Scripts in use: Proto-hieroglyphs; Hieroglyphic (from c.3200)

3rd millennium BC
Spoken and written language: Old Egyptian
Scripts in use: Hieroglyphic, Hieratic

2nd millennium BC
Spoken and written languages: Middle Egyptian; Late Egyptian (from c.1400 BC)
Scripts in use: Hieroglyphic, Cursive Hieroglyphic, Hieratic

1st millennium BC
Spoken languages: Late Egyptian, Demotic, Greek
Written languages: Neo-Middle Egyptian, Late Egyptian, Demotic, Greek
Egyptian scripts in use: Hieroglyphic, Hieratic, Demotic

1st millennium AD
Spoken languages: Demotic, Greek, Latin; Coptic (five dialects); Arabic (from 7th century AD)
Written languages: Neo-Middle Egyptian, Demotic, Coptic, Arabic
Egyptian scripts in use: Hieroglyphic, Demotic, Coptic

A magical stela

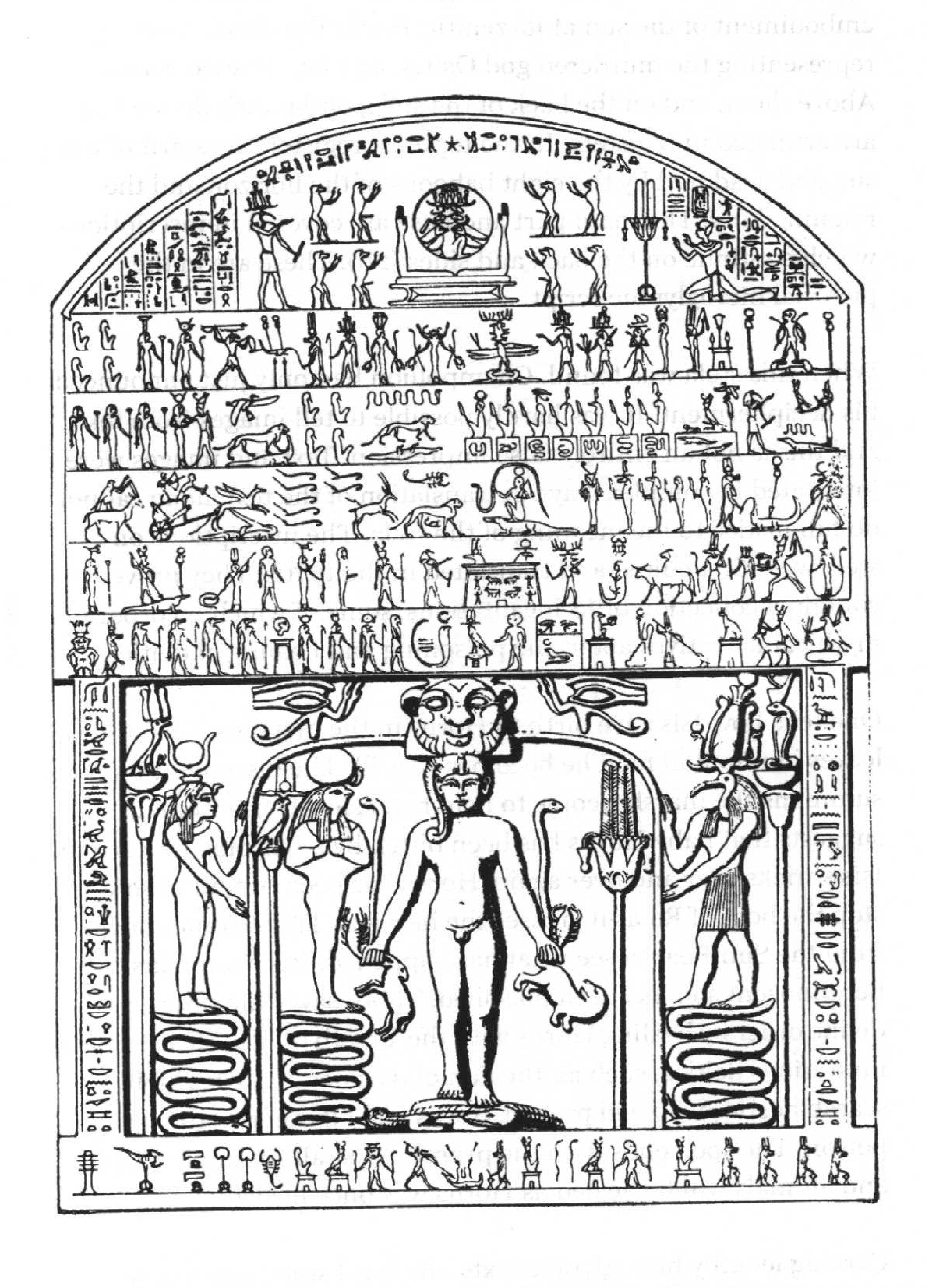
Egyptian belief in the power of the written word is exemplified by a beautifully preserved stela (a slab decorated with images and inscriptions) found during the digging of a well in AD 1828 (Figure 2a-b). It is the largest example of a type of stela known as a cippus, from a Greek word meaning 'shield'. The stela was given by the ruler of Egypt to the Austrian Chancellor, who installed it in Schloss Metternich. Thereafter the piece was known as the Metternich Stela. In AD 1950 it was acquired by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.[1]

The centre panel features five deities who are prominent in Egyptian myth: (2a from left to right) Isis; Ra-Horakhty, the embodiment of the sun at its zenith; Horus the Child; a symbol representing the murdered god Osiris; and ibis-headed Thoth. Above them, and on the back of the stela, outlandish divine beings are arranged in registers. In the topmost register, the spirit of the sun god is adored by the eight baboons of the horizon and the reigning king. The main part and base are covered in inscriptions which continue on the back and sides (2b). These are in the pictorial hieroglyphic script.

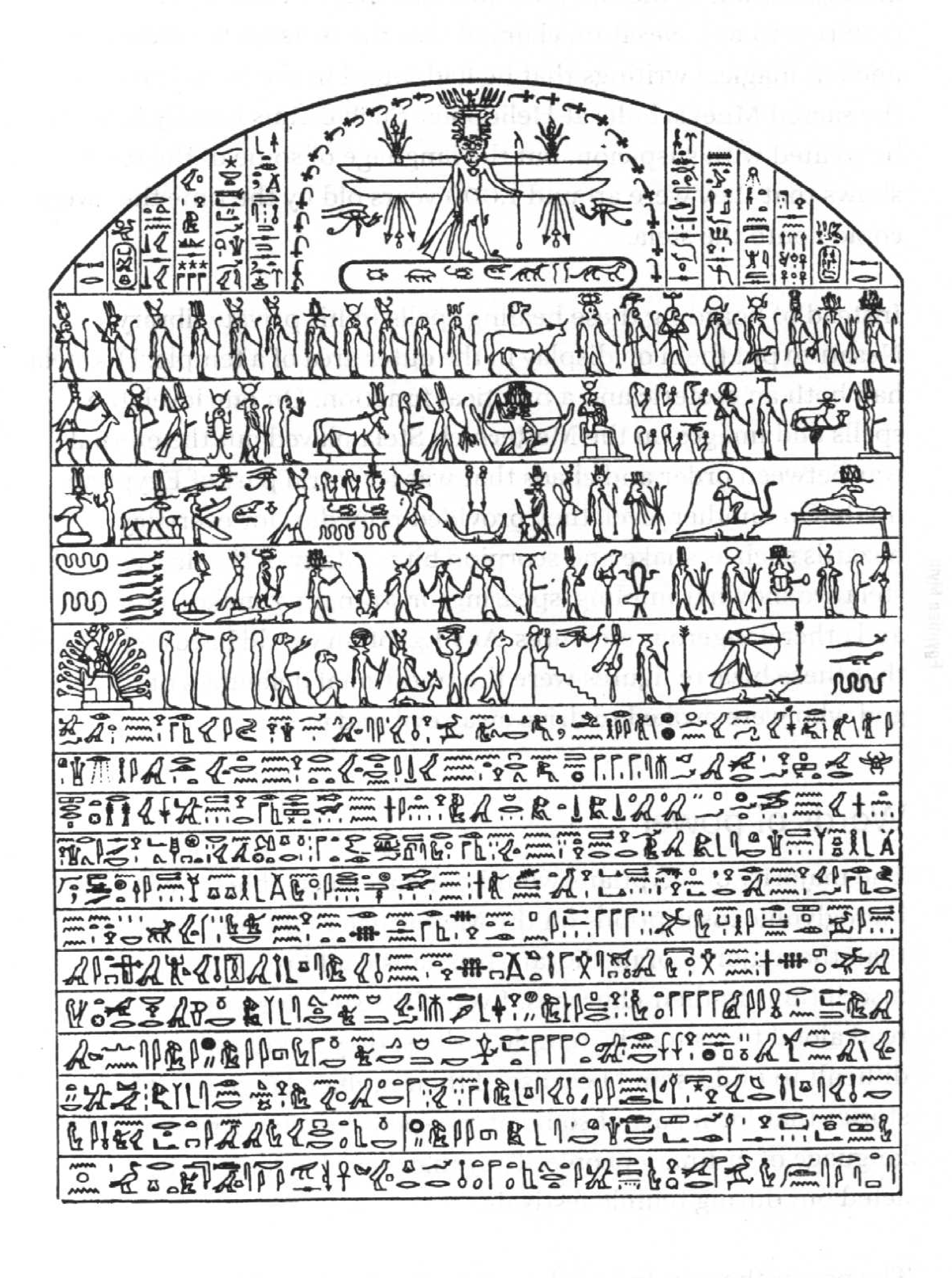
When this stela was found, Champollion had only just announced his decipherment. It was hardly possible to tell images from text and this is not an entirely false impression. Text and images were integrated in complex ways. A translation of the text alone cannot do full justice to the meaning of the stela. The inscriptions on the stela were first edited and translated in the 1870s. They proved to contain a collection of 13 incantations, some of which incorporate mythical narratives about the poisoning and healing of deities.

One tells how Isis gave birth to Horus in the marshes. When she leaves him to find food he becomes very ill. The distraught Isis summons the marsh-people to help her. A local wise woman suggests that baby Horus has been bitten by a scorpion or a snake. Isis shrieks over and over again 'Horus has been bitten!'. Her cries stop the boat of Ra as it crosses the heavens. Thoth comes down from the Sun Boat to see what has happened. Isis complains that her innocent son has been poisoned. Thoth saves the future of the divine order by healing Horus with the 'breath of life'. He lists all the mysterious deities, such as 'the lion of darkness' and 'the noble scarab beetle', who will protect Horus and all other victims of poison. The spell ends with the promise that all suffering people and animals will be healed as Horus was once healed.

Carving lengthy hieroglyphic texts into hard stone was a very skilful and time-consuming process and was undertaken only for



2a. Drawing of the upper part of the Metternich Stela



2b. Back of the upper part of the Metternich Stela

important reasons. According to the inscriptions, a priest called Nesatum had the stela made in honour of the Mnevis bull, an incarnation of the sun god, and his king, Nectanebo II (*c*.360–343 BC). Nesatum claimed that the texts on the stela were ancient magical writings that he had found in the burial ground of the sacred Mnevis bulls at Heliopolis. Such claims usually have to be treated with suspicion, but the language of some of the texts shows that they were around 1,000 years old by the time they were copied onto the stela.

Instead of hoarding these healing spells in his private library, Nesatum put them on display in the outer area of a temple. His stela had both an esoteric and a practical function. On one level, the spells and images on the Metternich Stela played out the eternal war between order and chaos that was a central part of Egyptian myth. On another level, they provided remedies for everyday hazards such as snake and scorpion bites. Many of the deities on the stela are shown trampling, spearing, or strangling snakes, crocodiles, and other dangerous creatures. Any Egyptian would have recognized that these bizarre figures were the traditional defenders of the sun god who were evoked to drive away evil and pain.

Words of power

The majority of Egyptians would not have been able to read the hieroglyphic inscriptions on the Metternich Stela, any more than the majority of medieval Christians could read the Latin inscriptions in their churches. Even if the stela inscriptions were read aloud to visitors by temple scribes, they might still have been difficult to understand because of their archaic language. The stories that form part of some of the spells are closer to the spoken language of ordinary people. They may have been recited or even acted out during temple festivals.

The power thought to be inherent in the words and images could be accessed by touching them. On some cippi the central figures have

been almost rubbed away by the touch of anxious hands. Another method was to pour water over the cippus. The patient then drank or bathed in this water to receive a transfer of life-giving energy. We think of the written word as something that is primarily read in silence and solitude. The Metternich Stela is a reminder that things were very different in Ancient Egypt.

Myths are often defined as 'sacred stories', so it might be assumed that they were always written in the 'sacred' hieroglyphic script, but this is very far from the case. The power thought to reside in this script made the Egyptians cautious about how they used it. Myths tend to focus on trouble and conflict in the divine realm. To put an evil act, such as the murder of Osiris by his brother Seth, into hieroglyphs could make it a permanent part of reality. Direct descriptions or representations of such acts were usually avoided.

The story preserved on the Metternich Stela does relate how Horus was poisoned, but it comes complete with a happy ending. Even then, the divine suffering described in the hieroglyphic text has to be counterbalanced by dozens of positive images of deities overcoming chaos-beasts. King Nectanebo appears on the stela as an intermediary between the gods and the people who sought healing. One of the main purposes of the hieroglyphic script was to allow kings to communicate with gods and ancestors on behalf of humanity. To understand this we will have to look back at the history of writing in Egypt.

Writing and royalty

Hieroglyphs were both a practical means of communication (see Box 3) and a system for classifying the world. Individual hieroglyphs are pictures of the deities, people, animals, plants, and objects which made up that world. The script was probably invented at the court of the southern kings who ruled most of Egypt by the late 4th millennium BC. The earliest hieroglyphs are on labels recording tax payments, royal possessions, and gifts made by

the king to temples of the gods. During the early 3rd millennium BC, longer hieroglyphic texts were inscribed on stone buildings, statues, and stelae. It became standard to use the hieroglyphic script for inscriptions in temples and tombs and for royal pronouncements addressed to the gods or posterity. Boys were trained to read and write hieroglyphs in schools attached to palaces, royal burial grounds, and state-run temples. Nearly all of this educated elite went on to work for the government, often on projects such as pyramid building which emphasized the unique status of the king.

By the Old Kingdom (*c.*2686–2181 BC), the Egyptians had invented a writing paper made from papyrus and developed a simplified script, known as hieratic, which was used for letters and administrative documents. The creation of a hieroglyphic text on stone was a group project, but a hieratic text on papyrus was usually the work of a single scribe. Once hieratic started to be written in lines instead of columns, it became the main script for medical, magical, and literary texts (for an example, see Figure 7 in Chapter 7). Early versions of some of the spells on the Metternich Stela are written in hieratic.

No long narratives about deities survive from the Old Kingdom, but traditions about them may have been passed down orally. A huge number of gods and goddesses feature in a collection of spells from royal pyramids of the 24th to the 22nd centuries BC. These 'Pyramid Texts' often allude to mythical events, such as the creator Atum spitting or sneezing out the first pair of deities, Shu and Tefnut. The collection consists of five major categories of spell, including anti-snake spells of the type found on the Metternich Stela. The Pyramid Texts were not put together to explain the divine world or humanity's relationship with it. Their primary purpose was the transfiguration of the dead king or queen in whose pyramid they were inscribed. One method of achieving this was to ritually identify the deceased royal with characters and events in the divine realm.

Box 3

HOW HIEROGLYPHS WORK

The hieroglyphic script is not a childlike picture language but a sophisticated and flexible system deploying several different categories of sign. A single hieroglyph (sign) is sometimes used as an ideogram to represent a whole word. Thus the word for bull (*ka*) can be written with a picture of a bull with a stroke after it 𓃒𓏤. Hieroglyphs can also be phonetic, representing between one and four sounds. An owl 𓅓 writes 'm' and a piece of crocodile skin 𓆎 writes 'km'. The 25 signs which each represent a single consonant or semi-vowel are often called the 'hieroglyphic alphabet', but this alphabet was never used on its own.

Words spelled out with phonetic signs usually end with a non-phonetic sign which clarifies the meaning of a word or the category it belongs in. For example, the eye hieroglyph 𓁹 is placed at the end of words for sight or blindness. Such signs are known as determinatives or classifiers. When the eye hieroglyph is found at the beginning of a word, it may be writing the sound *ir* from *irt*, the Egyptian word for an eye. The *t* on the end makes *irt* a female noun, so when the eye of the creator is personified it becomes a goddess rather than a god. Word-play could generate myths. As the word for people sounded like the word for tears, humanity was said to be born from the tears of the eye goddess.

The way in which the language is written can provide evidence for the mythological roles of deities. The monster who represents the god Seth 𓃩 is used as a determinative for the word that means confusion. The names of all goddesses

Divine words

can be determined with a cobra. The solar disc hieroglyph ☉ | spells *ra*, the Egyptian word for the sun and the name of the sun god, but as a determinative it is used with words to do with time. The names of gods are usually followed by a seated figure of a deity 𓁚. The fact that this is rarely included in writings of Ra shows how closely this god was associated with the light of the sun. Ra was so important in the divine hierarchy that his name may be shown first in a phrase or title even when grammatically it should come at the end. Subtleties of this kind are lost when a hieroglyphic text is translated into English.

In spite of the god-like status claimed by kings, the Old Kingdom ended with the decline and collapse of central authority. Some Egyptologists have traced the great mythical theme of the war between order and chaos to the shock of this collapse.

A golden age

A century of disunity was ended by a king from the Upper Egyptian city of Thebes. The ensuing Middle Kingdom (*c*.2055–1650 BC) is generally regarded as the golden age of Egyptian literature. A wide range of prose and poetry written in Middle Egyptian survives. Middle Egyptian continued in use as a literary language for around 2,000 years. This is why a priest like Nesatum could read and understand ancient texts; educated Egyptians were not cut off from their past by a language barrier.

During the Middle Kingdom, elite burials could include coffins inscribed with elaborate spells to help the deceased in the afterlife (see, for example, Figure 5 in Chapter 5). These spells, collectively known as the Coffin Texts, contain even more allusions to mythical events than the Pyramid Texts. Some of the spells consist of

speeches by deities relating things they have done or suffered. In many cultures the oldest tellings of myths are first-person narratives, a form that arises naturally from oral tradition. The Coffin Texts also include dialogues between deities, which give more than one viewpoint on mythical events.

Dialogues also feature in the genre known as Instruction or Wisdom Texts in which an authority figure (a god, king, or father) instructs a pupil on how to live according to the rules of *maat* (order, truth, justice). Some of these texts are realistic enough to acknowledge that the younger generation, who do not share the experiences on which their elders' beliefs are based, will probably reject the advice they are given. These are generally classed as ethical rather than religious texts, but they are full of references to myths.

A small number of stories survive from the Middle Kingdom, including part of a tale about Seth's attempted seduction of his nephew Horus. These early stories did not enjoy the high status of Instruction Texts, but they are far from being simple or clumsily told. 'The Shipwrecked Sailor' (*c.*1900 BC) is a tale of disaster overcome, told to cheer up an official in trouble with his king. The plotline, in which a sailor stranded on a remote island is saved by a mysterious snake, reworks a myth about the end of the world found in the Coffin Texts. In a surprising twist, the official refuses to cheer up, rejecting a view of the world where justice rules and the good are helped by the gods. By the Middle Kingdom, Egyptian authors were displaying a distanced attitude to myth and using it creatively to express ideas about a person's role in society.

A story cycle preserved in Papyrus Westcar (*c.*1700 BC) may be closer to popular oral tradition, but it has a complex structure. The story is set at the court of King Khufu (Cheops), the builder of the Great Pyramid. His sons entertain the king by recounting tales of great magicians who served Khufu's royal ancestors. One of the princes caps this by telling of a peasant called Djedi whose magic is

more powerful than any magician of the past. When the feisty 110-year-old magician visits court he has a battle of wills with Khufu over the proper uses of magic. Djedi prophesies that three marvellous children are about to be born. The story then shifts to the house of a priest, whose wife Ruddjedet is experiencing a difficult labour. The sun god Ra, who seems to be the children's true father, sends deities disguised as a group of dancing girls and their porter to help Ruddjedet. After the triplets are born the deities leave three crowns hidden in the house.

The original audience would have known that Ruddjedet's children were destined to be the kings who replaced Khufu's dynasty. Egypt's long history made it possible to set fantastic stories far in the past. It was also permissible to portray kings of the past in an unflattering way for didactic purposes. Around the time of Papyrus Westcar, there was another decline in royal authority. During this Second Intermediate Period (*c.*1650–1550 BC), foreign rulers known as the Hyksos took control of the Delta. The Hyksos were eventually driven out by a Theban dynasty, and Egypt was reunited.

Innovations in the New Kingdom

During the New Kingdom (*c.*1550–1069 BC), Egypt acquired an empire in Nubia and the Near East and was at the height of its cultural vigour. Rulers like Thutmose III, the dedicator of Cleopatra's Needle, spent the wealth flowing in from the empire on a massive temple-building programme. The New Kingdom royal tombs in the Valley of the Kings were modest in scale but beautifully decorated by a community of artists and scribes who lived at Deir el-Medina. Texts now known as Underworld Books were copied from scrolls kept in temple libraries on to the walls of royal tombs. The central theme of these books was the journey of Ra. At night the sun god was believed to enter a dangerous realm where the enemies of the divine order tried to prevent him from reaching the eastern horizon to renew the world at dawn. In most

Underworld Books a series of captioned pictures replaced a written narrative.

Pictures were also of great importance in the New Kingdom collection of funerary texts now called the Egyptian Book of the Dead. Many owners of Books of the Dead would have been unable to read the hieroglyphic texts, but they could understand the complex vignettes that summarized the content of the spells. By the end of the New Kingdom, some elite burials included 'Mythological Papyri'. These illustrated mythical events, such as the separation of earth and sky, which had rarely been shown before.

Around the 14th century BC, a new form of the written language was introduced for informal texts. Late Egyptian was closer to the way that people actually spoke and it reflected a more ethnically diverse society. Only a small number of Late Egyptian stories are known, but they are of remarkable interest. Some survive in copies from Deir el-Medina, showing that literature was enjoyed by the newly prosperous 'middle class'. A lively narrative about the rivalry between Horus and Seth will be examined in detail in Chapter 7. The Late Egyptian stories known as 'The Doomed Prince' and 'The Tale of the Two Brothers' have been described as the world's oldest fairy tales because they include motifs, such as a princess imprisoned in a tower or a magician hiding his heart in a tree, which are found in the folklore of later cultures. 'The Tale of the Two Brothers' belongs to a peculiarly Egyptian genre in which mythical events seem to be re-enacted by human or semi-human characters.

Turbulent times

The New Kingdom ended with power divided between kings of Libyan descent in the north and the Theban priesthood in the south. During the 1st millennium BC, Egypt endured civil wars and a series of foreign invasions (see the timeline at the end of the book). A period of rule by a Nubian dynasty was ended by a brutal Assyrian invasion. In the 7th century BC, the Assyrians were driven out by an

Egyptian dynasty from Sais. Around this time a new script known as Demotic was introduced for everyday purposes. The same Greek term (meaning 'common') is used for a stage of the Egyptian language. A wide range of Demotic literature developed, some of it showing Greek influence. Tantalizing fragments of many story cycles and epics survive.

In the 5th century BC, the Persians conquered Egypt, but Egyptian leaders fought back with the aid of Greek mercenaries. For a time Egyptian-born kings ruled again. The Metternich Stela dates to the very last of these kings, Nectanebo II. In times of trouble, the Egyptians tended to look back to their glorious past. Nesatum emphasized that his spell collection was very old to give it authority and power. The spells created a version of the past in which *maat* always triumphed. His stela would have conveyed the message that the educated elite were still in charge and able to offer temple visitors access to ancient wisdom.

Only a few years after the Metternich Stela was set up, the Persians invaded again. Nectanebo fled, and many temples were plundered. Egypt next became part of the short-lived empire of Alexander the Great (356–323 BC). Ptolemy Lagus, one of Alexander's Macedonian generals, founded the dynasty that was to rule Egypt from Alexandria for nearly 300 years. During the Ptolemaic Period, Greek became the language of the administration, but Egyptian culture continued to flourish in temples. The Ptolemies contributed to a huge temple-rebuilding programme. This was continued for a century or so after Egypt became part of the Roman Empire in 30 BC.

Last days

The period from around 400 BC to AD 100 was an important one for the sources of Egyptian myth. Some myths and legends were expanded into elaborate literary narratives, regional myths were recorded in illustrated scrolls, and a few mythical narratives or

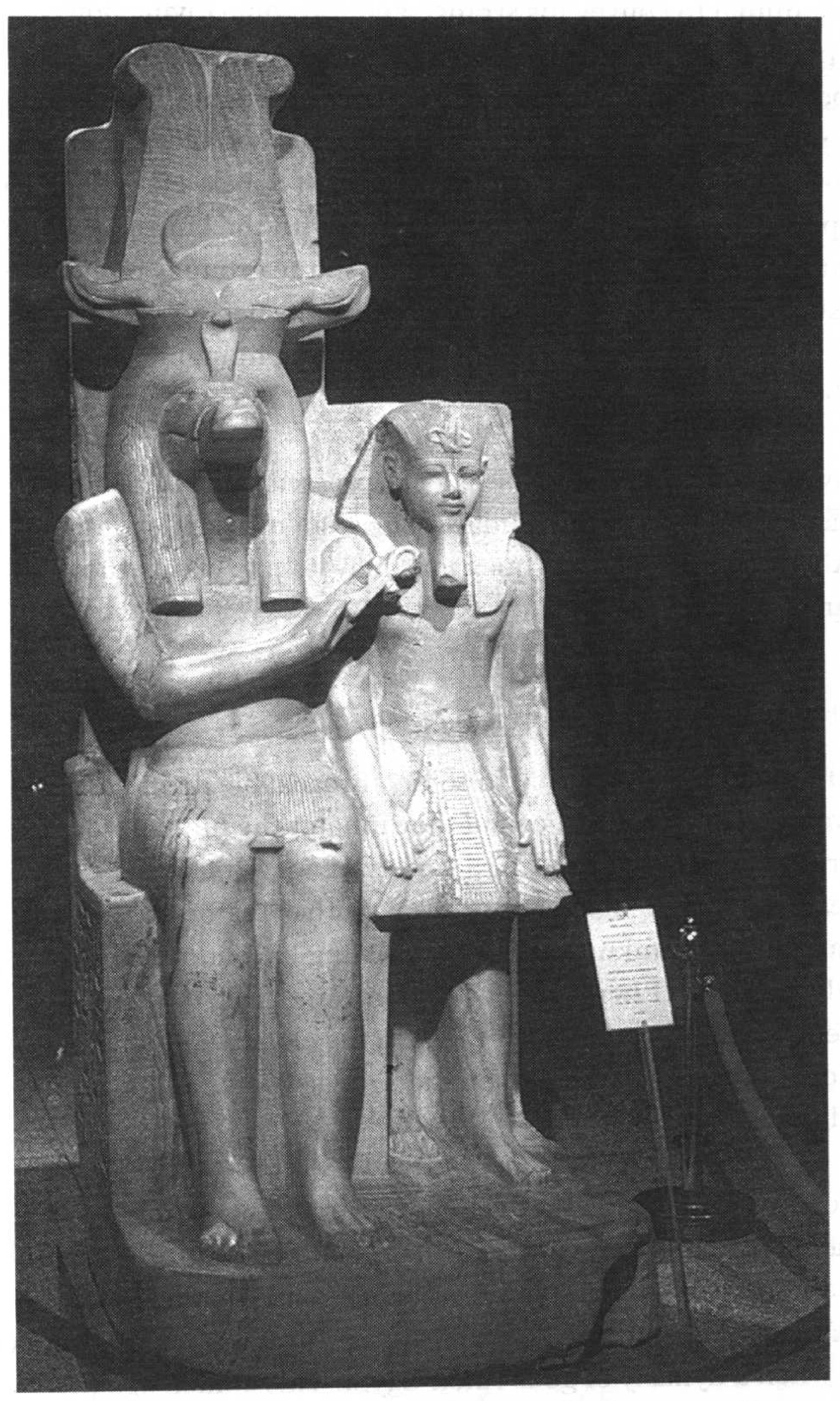
dramas were inscribed in hieroglyphs on temple walls. A fear that Egypt's culture was under threat from outsiders may have stimulated this impulse to collate and preserve the country's myths. Many foreigners were genuinely interested in Egyptian religion, but they could not read the texts inscribed on temple walls or the books kept in temple libraries. Authors like Plutarch had to rely on stories that he, or earlier Classical writers, had been told by Greek-speaking Egyptians.

A script using the letters of the Greek alphabet with the addition of a few Demotic signs evolved around the 1st century AD. Some Hermetic and magical texts were written in this Coptic script, but most of the surviving literature in Coptic is Christian. By the 4th century AD, Christianity was the dominant religion in Egypt. Spells like those on the Metternich Stela were still used, but Isis and baby Horus were replaced as the main characters by Mary and baby Jesus. Modern Western ideas about divinity have been shaped by monotheistic religions such as Christianity. In the next chapter we will look at what the Egyptians thought about their deities.

Chapter 3
The gods themselves: deities and myth

The deities of Ancient Egypt are better known from their appearences in art than in myths. One of the masterpieces displayed in the Luxor Museum is a calcite pair statue showing King Amenhotep III (*c*.1391–1353 BC) embraced by the crocodile god 'Sobek-Ra, Lord of Sumenu' (Figure 3).[1] The seven-ton statue was found in a sealed pit in Dahamsha (ancient Sumenu) in AD 1967. The pit may once have been a temple pool where sacred crocodiles were bred. While most visitors to the museum can appreciate the technical brillance of this statue, its subject matter is of a kind that puts many people off Egyptian art. The dominance of royalty is now seen as sycophantic and politically primitive. Modern viewers often find images of animal-headed deities ridiculous or even repugnant, just as many ancient Greeks and Romans did. Classical art has its gods and monsters, but in Egypt the monsters seem to be the gods.

These attitudes are partly based on a misunderstanding of Egyptian art. Like much modern abstract art, Egyptian art is concerned with capturing the essence of a thing and with giving a tangible form to complex ideas. Amenhotep III was portrayed not as he happened to be but as the godlike youth and ideal ruler that Egypt needed. This meant that a century later Ramesses II was able to transform the piece into a statue of himself simply by carving his own name in place of Amenhotep's.



3. Pair statue of Sobek-Ra and Amonhotep III in the Luxor Museum

Sobek-Ra was an entity who combined the essence of two deities: the crocodile god and the sun god. This dual god is depicted as part animal to convey his strange and awesome divine powers. In particular, he has the strength, cunning, and longevity of the crocodile and power over the life-giving waters of the Nile. The solar disc in the headdress conveys that Ra, god of life-giving light, is manifesting himself in his form of Sobek. He is depicted as part human to allow him to interact with the king and offer him the *ankh*, the symbol of life. The statue group is intended to show, and by showing to bring about, the desired loving relationship between the king, representing humanity, and Sobek-Ra, representing the gods.

How was the nature of these gods expressed in myth and how different were they from Judaeo-Christian or Islamic ideas of the divine? A series of questions may help to clarify these issues.

Where did the gods live?

Did Egyptian deities dwell in some unreachable divine realm beyond space and time, or did they inhabit the human world? There is evidence for a variety of answers to this question. A few religious texts speak of the creator god Amun as an invisible, unknowable force existing beyond the limits of the cosmos. Others emphasize that something of the essence of the creator was present in the elements that made up the cosmos and in all the beings whom he had made.

One answer to where did the gods live might be 'in the past'. In a letter to his dead wife, a scribe called Butehamun refers to Ra and his ennead, or council, as being gone like the kings of old. Most of the surviving mythical narratives are set in a remote era when a dynasty of gods ruled Egypt. This golden age was terminated by the first acts of rebellion and murder (see Box 1).

Gradually, the gods withdrew to divine realms beyond and below the earth. There they lived in their mysterious true forms, as huge, radiant beings with an overpoweringly sweet scent. Most humans could only enter the divine realms after death, but deities continued to interact with the human world in a variety of ways.

Deities could manifest themselves in natural phenomena such as storms, floods, and plagues. Their spirits could be 'resident' in special or unusual people, such as kings and dwarfs, and in sacred animals, trees, and objects. One of the main functions of Egyptian art was to provide temporary bodies for deities in the form of statues, drawings, or hieroglyphs. Much of the ritual that went on in Egyptian temples was aimed at encouraging the gods to inhabit these bodies so that their presence could benefit humanity. Thus, a deity like Sobek could be thought of as living simultaneously in the primeval ocean before creation, in a palace in the mountains of the horizon, in wild areas of Egypt's lakes and marshes, and in the statues and sacred crocodiles kept in his temples.

How many deities did the Ancient Egyptians have?

Experts on Egyptian religion have given answers to this question that range from 'one' to 'thousands'. Egyptian religion is generally considered to have been a sophisticated form of polytheism. Right from the beginning it had many deities of both genders. People were free to worship or placate those manifestations of the divine that seemed most relevant to their lives. For example, if you made your living on the Nile, the crocodile god might be the focus for your devotions.

In the course of Egyptian history, about 80 deities had shrines or temples built for them in more than one place. Some deities, such as the sky goddess Nut, were rarely the subject of a cult but were very prominent in myth. Putting the evidence of cult and myth together,

about 30 gods and goddesses could be described as major national deities (see Box 4).

The Egyptian word *nṯr* (god or power) was used for these major deities and for numerous lesser beings, such as star gods, personified concepts, deified kings, the denizens of the underworld, and the bizarre protective beings shown on objects like the Metternich Stela. If all these entities are included in the pantheon, there are hundreds of named deities. If each manifestation of a deity worshipped at a particular place, such as 'Sobek-Ra, Lord of Sumenu', was counted separately, the list would run into thousands. Egyptian myth has a large potential cast of characters.

Some Egyptologists have argued that from primitive beginnings Egyptian religion developed into a type of monotheism. Egyptian ethical texts simply refer to god in the singular as the force that rules the universe. Creation myths show that the Egyptians believed in a primeval being who had created an infinite number of deities, people, and animals. From the New Kingdom onwards, some texts treat the whole Egyptian pantheon as merely souls or forms of this primeval creator. The heretic King Akhenaten (*c*.1352–1336 BC) tried unsuccessfully to abolish all deities except Aten, a solar creator god. His successors accepted that within the great cycle of creation, the divine was always manifest in numerous gods and goddesses.

Each of these deities could split into a pair or group, or merge with another deity. Some Egyptian texts praised Sobek-Ra as the one creator god. Others, such as the hymns dismissed as 'unmitigated rubbish' by Gardiner, listed the numerous forms of Sobek existing in various parts of Egypt. Sobek and Ra could merge into a solar-crocodile-creator, as in our statue, but both Ra and Sobek continued to function separately. The fluid way that deities were treated in Egyptian thought probably worked against the development of narrative myths.

Box 4

MAJOR DEITIES IN MYTH AND CULT

Amun/Amun-Ra – Creator deity, worshipped at Thebes as King of the Gods

Anubis – Jackal god, inventor of mummification and guardian of cemeteries

Atum/Atum-Ra – Creator deity of Heliopolis and evening form of the sun god

Bastet – Feline goddess, defender of Ra and bestower of fertility

Geb – Earth god, consort of Nut and head of the divine tribunal

Hathor – Cow goddess of birth, death, and cosmic renewal

Horus – Sky falcon, opponent of Seth and archetypal ruler of Egypt

Isis – Widow of Osiris, mother of Horus and Mistress of Magic

Khepri – Scarab god of dawn and renewal

Khnum – Ram god, creator deity and controller of the Nile flood

Khonsu – Creator moon god and controller of Fate

Maat – Daughter of Ra and goddess of truth and justice

Min/Amun-Min – God of male sexuality and agricultural fertility

Mut – Avenging goddess worshipped at Thebes as consort of Amun-Ra and mother of Khonsu

Neith – Creator goddess and defender of the sun god

Nekhbet – Protective vulture goddess of the south

Nephthys – Sister of Isis and unwilling wife of Seth

Nun – God of the primeval ocean

Nut – Sky goddess and mother of Osiris, Isis, Seth, and Nephthys

Ogdoad of Hermopolis – Eight primeval deities, including Amun and Nun

Osiris – Ruler of the underworld and god of crop fertility

Ptah – Creator god of Memphis and patron of artists and craftsmen

Ra – Creator sun god and Ruler of the Universe

Sekhmet – Ferocious solar lion goddess

Seth – Enemy of Osiris, rival of Horus, and strongest of the gods

Shu – God of air and sunlight who separated the earth and the sky

Sobek – Primeval crocodile god and Lord of the Nile

Sokar – Memphite god of death and regeneration

Tefnut – Sister of Shu and mother of Geb and Nut

Thoth – Lunar god of wisdom, language, and writing, with ibis and baboon forms

Wadjyt – Protective cobra goddess of the north

Were goddesses less powerful than gods?

To worship both male and female deities was the normal pattern for ancient religions. Even Judaism seems to have had a goddess who was the consort of Yahweh (a Hebrew word for God) before she was edited out of the textual record. The division into two main genders reflected the world as experienced. In that real world, Egyptian women did not share all the privileges of men. In myth, goddesses rarely seem inferior in power to gods. Most Egyptian creation myths made the creator primarily male, but some featured a primarily female creator, such as Neith, 'the mother and father of all things'. In theory, all deities were supposed to be obedient to the kingly sun

god Ra, but by the New Kingdom Ra had a female counterpart known as Raiyet.

In some myths, Ra seems dependent on the power of his ferocious daughter, the eye goddess. She was created when Ra-Atum sent his eye to search for his lost children, Shu and Tefnut, in the darkness of the primeval ocean. When she returned, the eye goddess wept to discover that Ra had grown another eye. It was from these tears that humanity originated.

Goddesses were quite often defined in terms of their relationship with a male deity. When they were worshipped as part of a pair, the female name was usually placed second, as it would have been with a human couple. However, if the goddess was playing a maternal role, the child deity was given the inferior position. The maternal role was more important for goddesses than the paternal role was for most gods. Romantic love is almost entirely absent from Egyptian myth, but maternal love was consistently portrayed as one of the most powerful forces in the universe.

The restrictions on religious art can make goddesses look misleadingly passive. In art, Isis appears as a co-wife, mourning Osiris or standing deferentially behind his throne, and as a mother, sweetly nursing her baby son. In myth, she is a dominant figure who fights to avenge her husband and plots to place her son on the throne of Egypt. In art, goddesses seem to have a wider range of physical forms than most gods. Their shape-changing abilities were also celebrated in myth. In one mythical episode, Isis changes from old crone, to young girl, to bird of prey (see Box 9 in Chapter 7).

The dual nature of the eye goddess, who dealt out both life and death, could be expressed in sudden changes of form. When Ra sent his eye to destroy humanity for the crime of rebellion, she was transformed into the raging lioness, Sekhmet. She devoured all the evil humans and had to be tricked by Ra into sparing the rest. Her

full lion form was vividly described in myth but very rarely shown in art. In general, goddesses were feared more than gods; there were no meek divine housewives in the Egyptian pantheon.

Was the Egyptian pantheon arranged into families?

Most Egyptians were less aware than we are of being unique individuals. They prefered to characterize themselves as being part of a family or hierarchical group, and seniority was respected. Egyptian deities often function in groups. In the presence of a senior god such as Ra, who is credited with kinglike authority, the others deities usually act like subservient courtiers.

Kinship terms were used rather loosely in Egypt, so when a god or goddess was called a son or daughter of Ra, this may mean only descendant or younger relative. The most famous group of Egyptian deities, the Ennead of Heliopolis, combined major elements of religious thought by fitting Osiris and Horus into the family tree of Ra-Atum. The four, or sometimes five, generations in this family tree span cosmic history from the creation of the world to the establishment of kingship (see Box 5). Deities could also be

Box 5

THE ENNEAD OF HELIOPOLIS

Atum/Ra-Atum

Shu – Tefnut

Geb – Nut

Osiris Isis Seth Nephthys

Horus

Some versions of this Ennead substitute Horus the Elder, a brother of Osiris and Seth, for Horus son of Isis.

arranged in what appear to be nuclear families, most commonly a triad of father, mother, and son. It would be a mistake to take such families too literally. There is rarely much consistency in these relationships. With a few exceptions, Egyptian deities are not fixed characters with fixed life histories. The most famous divine couple is Osiris and Isis, but Osiris was sometimes the husband of both his sisters, and Isis could be the sexual partner of her son Horus.

Most deities played particular roles, such as father, consort, or son, in relation to a wide range of other deities. In myth, Sobek was usually the son of the creator goddess Neith. At one of his cult centres he was paired with the snake goddess Renenutet, while Horus the Child took the role of their son. At another, Sobek was paired with the goddess Hathor, with the moon god Khonsu as the junior member of the triad. This pairing may have come about through association with the Nile, as Hathor could be linked with the Nile flood and with the north wind needed for sailing upriver. When Sobek was merged with Ra, his relationship with Hathor becomes more complex. In myth, Hathor could have a triple aspect as the mother, consort, and daughter of Ra; she was the eternal female complement of the sun god.

What are they deities of?

It has been traditional for scholars who study polytheistic systems to classify deities as being the gods or goddesses of some natural phenomenon or particular area of responsibility. Zeus, for example, is labelled as a sky god, and Aphrodite as the goddess of love. Such labels are useful for us (see Box 4) but may not correspond with the way that these deities were seen by their original worshippers. For the Egyptians, deities were first and foremost possessors of power. They could all be prayed to about anything, but there was some degree of specialization. The nature of a deity could be expressed by their names and epithets, by their appearance, and by the roles they played in myth.

Epithets of place were the most common, such as Sobek, Lord of Sumenu. Some gods and goddesses were simply the presiding spirits of a particular town, area, or local feature. Minor deities, such as Sia, god of creative thought, were merely personifications of concepts that would remain abstract in other cultures. Maat, the goddess who personified the divine order, began this way but developed into a more rounded figure in myth as the favourite daughter of the sun god. Other deities were linked to elements of the natural world but not in a simplistic way. The sun was only the visible manifestation of the glory of Ra, who defeated death and gave light and energy to all beings. Myth gave Ra another dimension as a fallible ruler saddened by revolts among humans and conspiracies among the gods. Some deities were associated with particular skills or areas of human experience, such as Thoth with writing, Isis with mourning and healing, and Hathor with love. These associations could generate myths.

Major deities usually had several spheres of interest, some of which overlapped with those of other deities. Few of Sobek's characteristics were exclusive to him, but together they formed a unique divine profile: he shared his crocodile form with other gods such as Seth and Khenty-khet; like Seth, he could be regarded as the strongest of the gods; like Min, he was the most virile of the gods, able to satisfy any number of goddesses; like Hapy, the spirit of the inundation (annual Nile flood), he was praised for 'greening' the desert; he was a local god to people in the Fayum area who lived around a lake full of crocodiles; he was the protector of those who worked on or near water, such as fishermen, bird-catchers, and washermen; he was the brutal instrument of fate who snatched people to sudden deaths; he was one of the creatures who embodied the primeval ocean; wearing his 'solar disc' hat, he was the deity who created and sustained the world.

Were Egyptian deities all-powerful and immortal?

In hymns and prayers deities are praised for their wisdom, strength, and power. In other writings, that power seems to come with limitations. Deities were expected to obey the rules of *maat*. They might be subject to fate and they did not always know what would happen in the future. In Egyptian myth, gods were depicted as longer-lived, stronger, and more powerful than people, but they did age and they were not invulnerable. In the story known as 'The Secret Name of Ra', the sun god suffered the indignities of old age and was harmed by *heka* (magic), one of the powers he had used to make the world. That world was like a small island in the ocean of chaos, and the forces of chaos posed a continuous threat to the gods.

In their struggles with chaos monsters or with each other, Egyptian deities could be injured or even die. Such deaths rarely seem to be more than a temporary inconvenience. Isis survived being beheaded. Seth was executed in a number of unpleasant ways but always came back again. In these cases it is usually only a particular body or manifestation of the deity that dies, but Osiris seems to die in a more final manner and could not go back to his former life in Egypt. Some Underworld Books imply that the sun god died each evening and was reborn each morning. Time was made up of inescapable cycles of birth, life, death, and renewal. The creator would eventually grow weary and return into chaos until it was time for the creation of a new world.

Were Egyptian deities good?

In the majority of temple inscriptions deities seem to be gracious and generous beings. They automatically respond to prayers and offerings by heaping blessings on the king and humanity. But magical texts that offer to protect people against the very same deities suggest that all was not sweetness and light. Some divine manifestations, such as a sevenfold form of the lion goddess Sekhmet, were greatly feared. Yet Sekhmet, daughter of Ra, was

not an evil goddess. The plagues and wars she inflicted were usually seen as just punishments decreed by the gods.

The 'good god' was a particular epithet of Osiris, which rather suggests that goodness was not an automatic attribute of deities. Originally the epithet may have been used as a disguised way of speaking about a terrifying death god, just as the Greeks used to refer to the dreaded Furies as 'the Kindly Ones'. In a Demotic story cycle, Osiris sends two demons to cause a civil war in Egypt and a priest-magician who discovers this divine plan is brutally murdered by Anubis.

The ethical standards expected of people do not seem to apply among the gods, but this is partly a result of turning the interaction of cosmic forces into stories with human-like characters. In myth, deities could be portrayed with human failings such as jealousy, lust, and bad temper. The earth and sky became a passionate couple (Geb and Nut) who had to be separated by force before creation could proceed. Human motivations might be provided for mythical acts, so Seth was sometimes said to attack his brother because of sexual jealousy.

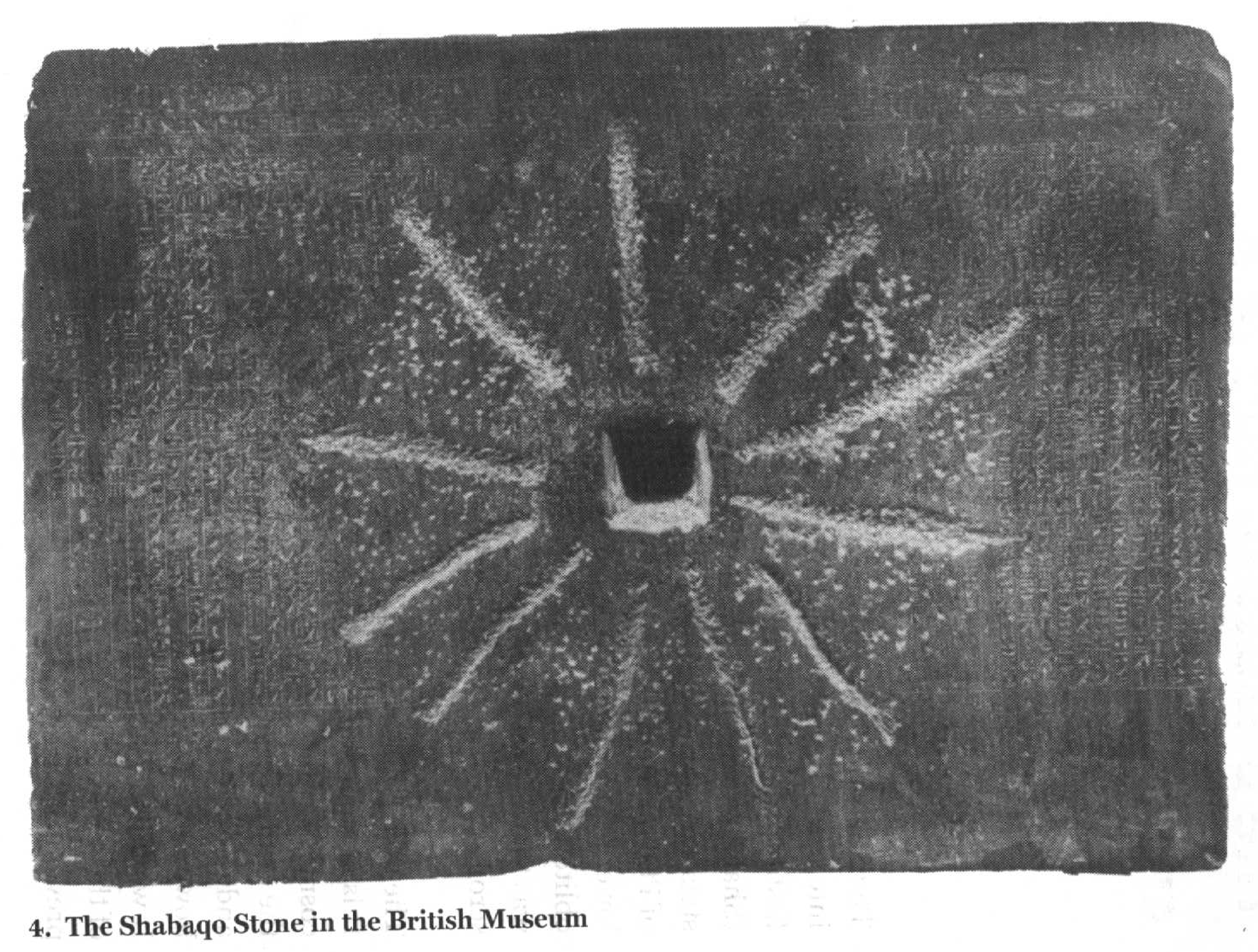
Seth had many faults but his strength was needed by Ra and his inappropriate lusts could lead to beneficial results, such as the birth of a moon god. In 'The Secret Name of Ra', Isis poisons the sun god with a magic snake and will only heal him in return for the power inherent in his true name. This wicked act seems to be justified because it will culminate in her son Horus becoming the model for all kings.

In a few sources even the creator sun god seems a terrifying deity who regularly consumes all other life. Our statue group could depict both extremes of the cycle, with Sobek-Ra as the primeval deity who swallows up the world and Amonhotep III as the solar child who renews the world. However, the majority of hymns, prayers, and ethical texts do celebrate the creator as a wise and merciful being. The next chapter will look at creation myths.

Chapter 4
The beautiful moment: creation myths

The Shabaqo Stone in the British Museum has been of intense interest to Egyptologists and theologians since its inscriptions were first translated in 1901.[1] This stela is named after King Shabaqo (Shabaka) who had it made in the 8th century BC (Figure 4). The stela was retrieved from a village built over the ruins of the temple of Ptah at Memphis. For many years the basalt stela was used as a lower grindstone, so parts of its hieroglyphic inscription have been obliterated, which is ironic because the purpose of this monument was to preserve on stone the contents of an ancient worm-eaten scroll.

The text from that scroll is now known as the Memphite Theology. It is a major source for two important areas of Egyptian myth: cosmogony (creation accounts) and the mythology of Osiris. Parts of the original text seem to have been lost by the time it was copied and damage to the stone has destroyed other sections. This shows how random the survival of sources for Egyptian myth can be. It would be wrong to think that we have a complete knowledge of the subject. At any time a new discovery could overturn previous ideas.



4. The Shabaqo Stone in the British Museum

The Memphite Theology

The Memphite Theology contains not one but several creation myths. This very diversity has made the Egyptian creation story less well known than it should be. The Memphite Theology was originally dated to the early 3rd millennium BC because its language seemed to be even more archaic than that of the Pyramid Texts. Scholars interested in tracing the origins of monotheism were excited by the Memphite Theology because it seemed to provide a very early example of a transcendent deity who used the power of his intellect to create the world. Theologians lost interest in the text after it was argued that the whole thing had been written in the 8th century BC and given a false history. Most Egyptologists now believe that the creation account in the Memphite Theology was actually composed around the 13th century BC, a period when there was particular interest in creator deities. Shabaqo's scribes may have rewritten the Memphite Theology in a very archaic style to give it greater authority.

Shabaqo was a Nubian king who had forcibly reunited Egypt under his rule. His dynasty were particular worshippers of Amun-Ra as creator sun god. They revered and enriched the temples of Amun at Karnak and Ra at Heliopolis. With this stela, Shabaqo tactfully honoured the claims of Ptah and his priesthood, while promoting a text that harmonized Memphite mythology with that of Heliopolis. It is a striking example of religious and cultural sensitivity from the 8th century BC.

So, what happens in the Memphite Theology? This profound text is not easy to interpret. The inscription is a mixture of poetry and prose, third-person narrative, and speeches put in the mouths of deities. It can be divided into four main parts. The first describes how King Shabaqo restored the ancient text and gives him a divine role model in the form of Ptah-Ta-Tenen as uniter and king of Upper and Lower Egypt. The second part is similar to a surviving Middle Kingdom script for a royal ritual. It traces the history of kingship to

the great debate over who should succeed the murdered god Osi as ruler of Egypt. The first decision of Geb and the divine tribun was to make Seth ruler of Upper Egypt, 'the place where he was born', and Horus ruler of Lower Egypt, 'the place where his fath was drowned'. Their second was to unify the country by making Horus sole king.

In typical Egyptian fashion, the text then goes backwards to the death of Osiris, the father of Horus. Rather than a linear narrati we are presented with a series of events together with their origi and consequences. These momentous events are located in and around Memphis, so that the victorious Horus can be identified with the Memphite god Ptah-Ta-Tenen. The third part of the inscription describes how Ptah created the world, while the four part alludes to a mystical union between Ptah and the resurrect Osiris. The cosmogony is well worth looking at in more detail.

The First Time

The Memphite Theology links Ptah with a whole series of deitie who represent elements of the primeval world. These deities, 'wl came into existence in Ptah', include Ptah-Nun and Ptah-Naune the male and female aspects of the dark, watery chaos of the primeval ocean. The potential for intelligent life was inherent in this ocean but was not realized until the spirit of the creator attained awareness. The list is damaged but it probably continu by linking Ptah with Ta-Tenen, 'the Rising Land', since elsewher the Memphite Theology, Ptah is identified with Ta-Tenen, the de 'from whom everything emerged'. The rising of the first mound land above the primeval ocean was one of the great events of the known to the Egyptians as the 'First Time'. The mound provide place in which the creator could come into being.

At Heliopolis, this primeval mound was associated with the sacr *ben-ben* stone, represented in temple architecture by obelisks su as Cleopatra's Needle. An alternative primal event is evoked by t

Box 6

CREATION IMAGERY

PLACES AND THINGS OF THE FIRST TIME:

Primeval ocean

Primeval marsh/reed thicket

Primeval mound

Primeval lotus

Cosmic egg

Potter's wheel

Willow tree

PRIMEVAL BEINGS:

Frogs and snakes (the Ogdoad)

Snake (Amun-Kematef, Atum, Neith)

Black bull (Amun, Ptah)

***benu* bird/phoenix (Atum, Ra, Osiris)**

Falcon (Horus the Elder)

Goose – 'the Great Cackler' (Amun)

Ibis (Thoth)

Crocodile (Sobek-Ra, Penwenti)

Cow (Mehet-Weret, Hathor, Neith)

Sun child (Ra, Nefertem)

Moon child (Khonsu, Thoth)

Eye of Ra (Hathor, Tefnut, Bastet, Sekhmet, and others)

Hand of Atum (Hathor, Nebethetepet, Iusaas)

Seed goddess (Hathor)

The Heh gods – supporters of the sky

last deity in the list, Nefertem, 'who is at the nose of Ra'. Nefertem was the god of the primeval lotus (or water-lily). The sweet-scented blue lotus was imagined rising above the primeval ocean and opening its petals to reveal a golden child. This was 'the beautiful moment', the very first sunrise when the creator became manifest as the youthful sun god.

In creation myths from other areas, images peculiar to local deities were used to convey the unknowable beginnings of life (see Box 6). The first act of creation might be a shining bird finding somewhere to perch in the middle of the primeval ocean or a goose known as the Great Cackler laying the egg from which the sun would hatch. Egyptian cosmogonies usually list several, apparently contradictory, primal events. The Egyptians do not seem to have regarded their creation myths as literally true. They are more like highly charged metaphors, drawn from the natural world.

Creative acts

The creator was now ready to create, but what were the means of creation? Again, more than one answer to this question is given in the Memphite Theology. When speculating about the beginnings of life, the Egyptians used the models of creativity they saw around them: the sexual acts that produced people and animals, the seed-sowing that produced crops, and the powers of the mind and the hand that produced objects. Ptah was the patron deity of artists and craftsmen, but the creation account begins by linking him with Atum of Heliopolis, who created 'with his semen and his fingers'.

Passages in the Pyramid and Coffin Texts describe how Atum became lonely in the primeval ocean. He acted as both father and mother by giving himself an erection, taking his 'seed' into his mouth, and spitting out the first divine couple, Shu and Tefnut. Some versions imply that the pleasure experienced by Atum in the sexual act was a vital part of the creative process. This may seem a shockingly primitive myth, but it was illustrated in graphic detail in

papyri placed in the tombs of high-ranking priests and priestesses. The androgynous nature of the creator was sometimes made clearer by personifying the hand of Atum as a goddess who united with his penis to create life.

The Memphite Theology restates the myth by using link words centred on the mouth. Atum used his mouth as a womb but the parts of the mouth could also represent the power of divine speech. The Egyptians believed that the intelligence controlling the body was located in the heart. In the Memphite Theology, Ptah is said to bring deities, people, and animals into being by devising them in his heart and naming them with his tongue. In other sources these powers of the creator are personified as the gods of insight/creative thought (Sia) and command/authoritative utterance (Hu). The 'divine words' of Ptah can, like hieroglyphs, make thoughts real. It was this more intellectual method of creation that led to comparisons between the Memphite Theology and the famous start of St John's Gospel – 'In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God'.

The Memphite Theology does not deny the truth of the creation myths of Heliopolis, but it supersedes them by stating that Atum was acting as the heart and tongue of Ptah. A creation text of the Graeco-Roman Period gives Ptah a similar position in the cosmogony of Hermopolis which centred on the mysterious primeval beings collectively known as the Eight (the Ogdoad). Ptah brings the Eight into being by three means: taking thought (intellectual), fashioning eggs (craft), and fertilizing the primeval marsh with his seed (sexual). He then causes the union of the Eight which transforms them into the One: the creator god Amun.

The creation of humanity is not given any particular emphasis in the Memphite Theology. This is probably because the standard myth of the origins of humanity was firmly linked with Ra. One version has humans originate from the tears shed by the solar child when he was separated from his mother, and deities from his

laughter when they were reunited. In Mesopotamian myth, humans were created as short-lived drudges to do the work of the lesser gods on earth. In Egyptian myth the creation of humanity seems more accidental, but serving the gods became a part of humanity's function.

The Memphite Theology stresses that Ptah created the moral and social order, including the concept of religion as it was to be practised by people. This primarily meant the adoration of statues which the *kas* (life-forces) of the gods would enter as bodies. Ptah also invented the crafts, such as sculpture, which humans could use to imitate his creative power. As both creator and ruler, Ptah continued as the controlling intelligence of the world like the unseen heart in the body. The gods Horus and Thoth were to embody his powers of insight and command in the age when the gods ruled Egypt.

The imperfections in the created world were not denied. The brief fourth section of the Memphite Theology reverted to the terrible tragedy of the drowning of Osiris but showed how this was transformed into something positive. Horus ensured that his father entered the secret realm where the gods of death and life could unite. The composite deity Ptah-Sokar-Osiris presided over the regeneration of the dead who were buried in the cemeteries of Memphis. In the realm of the living, the power of the creator, acting through Horus, was handed down to generations of gods and kings ruling Egypt from Memphis.

Creation myths and temples

Two German scholars who worked on early editions and translations of the Memphite Theology disagreed on what kind of text it was.[2] One thought that it was the rather garbled script of a mystery play with explanatory glosses. The other thought that it was a coherent theological treatise, though he acknowledged that the speeches it contained might derive from dramatized myths

performed in temples. Creation myths were a medium for philosophical speculation, but this could be secondary to less abstract motives.

On one level, the Memphite Theology can be seen as a classic validatory myth. It justifies the continued existence of institutions such as kingship and the priesthood by giving them divine origins. When national identity is under threat from outside forces, as it was in the 8th century BC, such myths become particularly important. The public display of this creation myth to the educated elite had the effect of acknowledging the crucial importance of the temple of Ptah and its priesthood. A cynic would take the Memphite Theology as a piece of propoganda designed to lure government funding away from competing temples. This may have been one of the text's purposes, but to view it only in this way would be to overlook the transformative role of Egyptian myth.

The Memphite Theology, whether it was read aloud or inscribed on stone, was thought to have the power to influence reality for the better. Creation narratives could help to remake the world in the divine image. The passage about creation from St John's Gospel is one of the readings for Christmas Day in many Christian churches. The creation of the world and the birth of the saviour of that world are presented as parallel events. In Egyptian ritual, an account of creation is often paired with the triumph of the creator sun god, or his representative the king, over the forces of chaos. Creation myths could be set in stone without fear because they were purely positive narratives that celebrated the founding of *maat*, the divine order.

As in many other ancient cultures, creation myths were intimately bound up with the architecture and function of cult temples. In some early Egyptian temples the main feature was a mound of sand. This almost certainly represented the primeval mound where the first act of creation took place. Later temples incorporated mounds, or single obelisks, or raised the floor of the sanctuary where the god's statue was kept to above the level of the rest of the building.

Temple texts do not treat such features as symbolic reconstructions, but as the actual place of creation. The fact that most major temples made the same claim was no more disturbing to the devout than the idea that the one God can be present in the bread and wine during communion services in thousands of different churches. All sanctuaries were, in a sense, the same place.

Other creator deities

The principal deity of a temple was often equated with the creator. This meant that local deities of both genders achieved the status of creator deity. To establish this status, a creation myth might be recited or acted out during a temple festival. In the temple of Horus at Edfu, creation began with the subduing of a primeval marsh and a celestial falcon perching on a reed. In the temple of Khonsu at Karnak, Khonsu was identified with a ram-headed snake who fertilized the cosmic egg.

Where a temple had two principal deities, both could be given creation myths. At Esna the separate creative powers of the ram god Khnum and the goddess Neith were celebrated in hymns. Khnum made life with his sexual power, by releasing the Nile flood that caused crops to grow and by crafting bodies on his potter's wheel. Creation was thought of as happening both in the past and the present, since new lives continued to come into existence. Before a person could be born, Khnum or Neith had to make them a body and animate it with the breath of life.

Like Ptah in the Memphite Theology, Neith was said to use divine words to create. In some versions of her myth, only seven words of power were needed to make the world. Neith was credited with inventing childbirth. She gave birth to the sun god in her cow form, which was equated with the life-giving powers of the primeval ocean. All substances that came from the body of a deity could become life forms. The spit or vomit of Neith became the chaos monster Apophis, who was the sun god's deadliest enemy. Neith

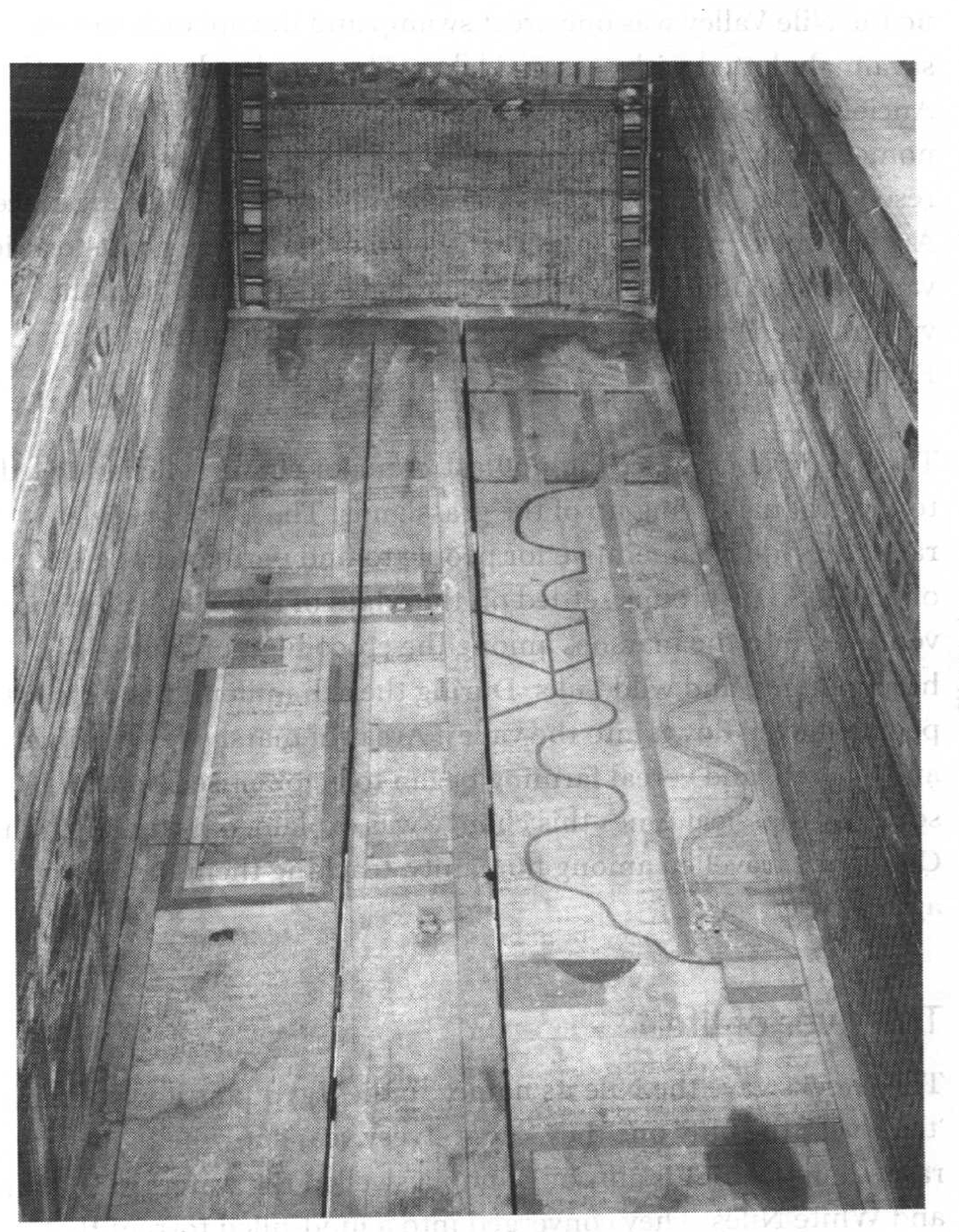
saved the solar child by lifting him above the watery chaos of the primeval ocean. As a creator, Neith seems a neutral force, making creatures of order and chaos, but by the end of the First Time she has chosen the side of order.

The sun god was often viewed as the active power of the creator in the world. In temple rituals and Underworld Books each sunset was treated like the end of the world. The nightly voyage of the sun god took him back into a dark chaotic realm. Figures from myths set in the mythical dawn of time, such as the mysterious Ogdoad and the gods of creative thought and authoritative utterance, helped the sun god to rise again and renew the world. Tomorrow was not just another day, but another world. For the Egyptians, their country was the centre of that world. In the next chapter we will look at the influence of the physical world on Egypt's mythology.

Chapter 5
Black Land, Red Land: the landscapes of myth

A set of cedarwood coffins in the British Museum is decorated with some of the oldest maps in human history (Figure 5). The coffins belonged to a doctor named Gua who lived in the 19th century BC and was buried at el-Bersheh near Hermopolis.[1] The maps claim to show the *duat*, the underworld through which the sun god and the human dead had to journey. Transected by a mighty river, this underworld contained snake-infested deserts, lakes of fire, and mysterious islands. The maps are part of a section of the Coffin Texts known as 'The Book of Two Ways'. One way through the underworld was by water (marked in blue) and the other way was by land (marked in black).

The accompanying texts describe the demons who guarded fiery gates or bends in the river; Gua was equipped with spells to get him past these fearsome guardians, including one that has him claim to be the doctor summoned to tend the wounded Osiris: 'Oh flames, make a pathway for me, so that I may come through. I restore Osiris to health.' The maps show the location of havens for the dead, such as the Field of Offerings and the Mansions of Osiris and of Thoth. Gua's ultimate goal was to join the creator sun god in his boat and sail the 'winding waterways' of earth and heaven. The mythical landscapes shown on objects like the coffin of Gua were inspired by Egypt's unique geography.



5. Floor of the outer coffin of the physician Gua

Primeval landscapes

Modern Egypt is around 90% desert, but until the 5th millennium BC the Nile Valley was one great swamp and the uplands were a vast savannah dotted with seasonal lakes. The people who became the Ancient Egyptians were hunters and cattle-herders with a semi-nomadic way of life. Outcrops of rock and conical hills that resembled the later pyramids were landmarks and gathering places. Ancient rock drawings show that the grasslands were home to a rich variety of wildlife. Many of these animals, such as the lion, the vulture, the jackal, and the gazelle, became associated with Egyptian deities.

This age of abundance did not last. A major change of climate led to the gradual drying up of the grasslands. The lack of regular rainfall made it imperative for people to find permanent sources of water. Some groups settled on the edges of the Nile Valley and ventured into the marshes among the crocodiles, cobras, hippopotami, and wild bulls. During the 4th millennium BC most people moved down into the valley. Areas of marsh were drained and cleared, and cereal farming began to be practised on a large scale. By Classical times this change was explained by the myth that Osiris had travelled among humanity, teaching them the arts of agriculture.

The river of life

The Greeks gave the Nile its name. To the Egyptians it was simply 'the river'; the only one they knew. Every year snowmelt and rainfall in the mountains of Ethiopia swelled the waters of the Blue and White Niles. They converged into a mud-filled torrent that flooded all the low-lying land within the Nile Valley and its Delta for several months. In the Delta, a few sandy hills remained permanently above the flood level. This may be why at Heliopolis and northern sites the primeval mound was said to be made of pure sand.

Box 7

THE EGYPTIAN COSMOS

The regions of the cosmos:

Outer darkness/primeval ocean

Upper sky and sky river/way of the day sun (Can be shown as a starry sky cow or as the naked goddess Nut. The upper sky is supported by Shu and his helpers – the Heh gods/sons of Horus/Hathor pillars.)

Void/realm of Shu

Mountains/trees/lions of the horizon (In some images the mouth of Nut is at the western horizon and her crotch at the eastern horizon.)

A round earth with Egypt in the centre surrounded by deserts and foreign lands

***Duat* underworld/inner sky/realm of Osiris**

River of the underworld/way of the night sun (Sometimes thought of as under the earth and sometimes as within the body of Nut.)

Abyss/primeval ocean

Coffins like that of Gua (Figure 5) could represent the cosmos in miniature, with a star-clock or a picture of the sky goddess on the interior of the lid and a map of the underworld on the floor. At certain periods Egyptian temples were designed to symbolize the newly created cosmos. The enclosure walls were equated with the encircling primeval ocean, the crypts with the underworld, the pylon gateway with the mountains of the horizon, and the roof with the upper sky.

The river dominated life for the valley-dwellers, so it was impossible for the Egyptians to conceive of a realm that had no equivalent. In Egyptian cosmology, the celestial realm in the sky and the underworld both have a river running through them (see Box 7). Other civilizations imagined the sun driving across the sky in a chariot; in Egypt, the sun, moon, and stars were shown sailing the heavens in boats. One name for Egypt was the 'Two Banks', as the river both unified and divided the country.

In many places the Nile Valley is only a few miles wide, but there were no bridges across the river. To get from one bank to the other always involved the risk of death by drowning or crocodile. The perilous boat journey became a central part of Egyptian myth. The boat of the sun god was attacked by a herd of wild asses or by the chaos serpent Apophis. The boat carrying the body of Osiris had to pass through a crowd of enemies before the god could rise again. A dead person like Gua travelled the river of the underworld using the Book of Two Ways as his guide.

The east bank of the river, where the sun rose, was the realm of the living. This made it the most appropriate site for towns and temples. The west bank, where the sun set, was designated as the realm of the dead and the proper place for cemeteries and mortuary temples. An alternative name for the underworld was the 'Beautiful West'.

Sea monsters and storm gods

The Egyptians also saw their territory as being divided into the fertile 'Black Land' of the floodplain and the barren 'Red Land' of the surrounding deserts. Osiris, Isis, and Horus were associated with the Black Land, and Seth, Nephthys, and Anubis with the Red Land. After the inundation had brought water and mud, it was possible to grow a very high yield of crops in the floodplain.

However, the precious Black Land was under constant threat from the Mediterranean Sea and from the desert.

The Mediterranean was referred to as 'the Great Green', but a more general term for the sea was 'the Encircler'. The primeval ocean, from which the creator had emerged, was still thought to surround the world. Egypt's northern coast depended on the annual deposits of silt to keep it above sea level. Coastal towns could be lost to the sea after earthquakes and tidal-waves. Land contaminated with salt was useless for cultivation. No wonder that one myth presents the sea as a greedy monster threatening to cover the whole land unless it is given more and more tribute, including the beautiful goddess Astarte. Seth, the strongest of the gods, was the champion who drove back the sea monster. This story seems to be adapted from an Ugaritic myth from Syria, but it was very relevant to the concerns of the low-lying eastern Delta, where Seth was a popular deity.

The ultimate source of the Nile was thought to be in the primeval ocean. The inundation was described as returning Egypt to its primeval state. The flood waters needed to be carefully controlled by systems of canals and dykes. When the flood levels were higher than average, villages might be swept away and people might drown. When they were lower than average, fewer crops could be grown and people might starve. The inexorable movement of the river bed could slowly destroy settlements, as seems to have happened with much of ancient Memphis.

Worship was given to the divine controllers of the Nile, such as creator gods and star goddesses, rather than the river itself. Sixteen vases or sixteen figures of Hapy, who personified the benevolent aspects of the inundation, were shown in some temples to represent the perfect water level. As time went on many core myths were reconfigured to explain the inundation and ensure its continuance. The tears that Isis shed for her murdered husband, and the substances that leaked from his body, were both said to be the cause

of the inundation. The power of the inundation to bring both life and death was linked to the myth of the 'Distant Goddess'. This was the daughter of Ra who quarrelled with her father, went to live in the desert, and had to be persuaded to return.

The deserts that made up the Red Land contained valuable resources such as minerals and building stone, but expeditions sent to exploit these resources risked death through thirst, heat-exhaustion, sandstorms, or flash-floods. Land reclaimed from the desert could be overwhelmed by the violent storms said to be caused by Seth thundering in the sky, or by the slow but unstoppable progress of huge sand dunes. The need to keep irrigation canals clear of sand was so pressing that Egyptians even expected to have to do this work in the afterlife. The outer coffin of Gua is one of the earliest sources for the 'Shabti Spell' which summons a magical worker to shift sand on behalf of the deceased. Given these environmental conditions, it is not surprising that Egyptian mythology structures life as a constant struggle between the forces of order and chaos. In this struggle, all humans were expected to play their part.

Into the marshes

The myths and folk tales of many cultures involve the hero or heroine leaving their home and entering a great forest or jungle. There they can have adventures and meet supernatural beings. It is a journey of initiation and transformation. Beauty can meet the Beast, a knight can kill a dragon or find the true grail. The Egyptians had no forests or jungles, but they could leave their ordered world behind by entering a marsh or a desert.

Areas of wild marsh remained on the edges of the Nile Valley and in parts of the Delta. Marshlands were celebrated in Egyptian art and literature as places of delight and danger. They were sacred to Hathor-Sekhet, the Great Wild Cow; Sobek, Lord of Lakes; and

Wadjyt, the cobra goddess. The dead are shown in tomb paintings hunting and fishing in the domain of these deities. The tranquil reedbeds of the Delta inspired the Egyptian paradise known as the 'Field of Reeds'. It was easy to imagine that tall papyrus thickets hid the floating island of Chemmis where Isis gave birth to her marvellous son Horus. A story inscribed on the Metternich Stela tells how Isis and her seven magical scorpions fled from Seth and took refuge in a remote marsh village. She is refused hospitality by a rich woman but taken in by a fisherwoman. The scorpions sting the rich woman's child in revenge. Isis cures the child after the rich woman gives her wealth to the fisherwoman. This story probably reflects the popularity of the Delta as a hiding place for fugitives in times of political turmoil.

In an intriguing Middle Kingdom story-fragment a herdsman grazing his cattle in water-meadows encounters a goddess by a lake. Her appearence is so terrifying that the herdsman's hair stands on end and his limbs tremble, but he refuses to be driven away. In their second encounter, the goddess appears as a naked and alluring woman. Here the fragment ends, so we do not know if the herdsman accepted the goddess's erotic overtures and whether this would have been fatal. The god Seth was horribly punished for mating with a goddess he met in similar circumstances.

Beyond the valley

Equally dangerous supernatural beings were to be found just beyond the hills that edged the Nile Valley. Until around 1500 BC, the desert was shown as the home of monsters such as griffins, serpopards (snake-headed felines), and the Seth creature, which blended elements of several exotic animals. The Great Sphinx at Giza, with its lion body and human head, was a desert monster fighting on behalf of order. King Thutmose IV, the father of Amonhotep III, claimed that the sphinx had spoken to him while he slept in its shadow. The sphinx-god complained that sand had been allowed to overwhelm his body, preventing him from defending the

royal tombs. The monsters become less common in art around the time when the deserts closest to Egypt were becoming more arid. As the desert lost most of its wildlife and vegetation, it became too empty to be the home of monsters.

The deep desert was the realm of the Distant, or Far-Wandering, goddess. Her story was sometimes localized to the western (Libyan) desert, the southern (Nubian) desert, or the remote land of Punt. There she roamed in the form of a wild cat, a lioness, or a female griffin. The gods who were sent to find her had to disguise themselves as apes or monkeys before they could even risk approaching her. Thoth, the god of wisdom, had to use all his eloquence to persuade this estranged daughter of Ra to leave her lonely wilderness and return to civilized society in the Nile Valley. He described how desolate Egypt was without her radiant presence and told her fables illustrating the workings of the divine order. In one, even the death of a fly is noticed by Ra and ultimately avenged by a griffin, the most terrible of the sun god's messengers.

In stories, terrifying things tended to happen to people who left Egypt. A sailor sees all his companions drown ('The Shipwrecked Sailor'); the innocent Bata is betrayed by his wife and murdered by soldiers ('The Tale of the Two Brothers'); a prince is attacked by a snake, a dog, and a crocodile ('The Doomed Prince'); a priest is robbed by pirates ('The Voyage of Wenamun'). The return of the hero to Egypt, wiser than when he left, was the proper ending for such stories. Bata manages to survive no less than three deaths to become king of Egypt.

One of the most popular of Egyptian literary texts was the story of Sinuhe. At the start of this story, Sinuhe flees from Egypt after being implicated in a plot to kill King Amenemhet I (*c.*1985–1956 BC). He is forced to live among the 'sand-dwellers'. Sinuhe marries the daughter of a chieftain and overcomes an enemy champion in single combat, but he longs to return home. Nothing matters more to Sinuhe than being buried in the land where he was born.

Eventually, the new king grants his wish. To an Egyptian, every part of his country was sacred ground, but many people felt a special attachment to the local deity of their home area.

Local deities and localized myths

From early times, every settlement of any size had a shrine dedicated to the god or goddess who presided over the region. In some periods, the governor of the region was also the high priest of the local deity. Eventually, each of the 42 nomes (administrative districts) of Egypt had its official deity or group of deities. The nomes were represented by a symbol or set of symbols similar to an heraldic device. These might be linked to the nome deity or to the original title of the nome. For example, the 17th Upper Egyptian nome was called the Jackal Nome; it was represented by a seated jackal with a feather, and the presiding deity was the jackal god, Anubis; whereas the 15th Upper Egyptian nome was called the Hare Nome and was represented by a hare, but the presiding deities were Thoth and the Ogdoad of Hermopolis. Gua served the governor of the Hare Nome, a man named Djehutyhotep ('Thoth is Gracious'). The Mansion of Thoth probably features in Gua's map of the underworld because Thoth was his local deity.

Local traditions were often recorded in lists of sacred beings, places, and objects. A papyrus found in Tanis lists the festivals, taboos, cemeteries, sacred animals and fish, snake-deities, sacred trees, mounds, and lakes for each nome. These lists allow a glimpse of the variety of belief beneath the uniformity imposed in temple art. In one nome it might be taboo to hunt crocodiles because they represented the benevolent god Sobek; in another it would be considered a religious act to kill them because they were 'Followers of Seth' who had fought against the good gods Osiris and Horus. In a few surviving papyri the lists are elaborated into a local mythology.

The richest source is an illustrated scroll known as Papyrus Jumilhac, which dates to around the 4th century BC. Its contents

include myths that explain distinctive features of the Jackal Nome such as place names, rituals, and unusual plants, minerals, or topographical features.[2] In one section we are told that an army of the Followers of Seth had once gathered on a particular mountain. Anubis attacked them at night and severed all their heads with one blow. The mountain was covered with their blood and this was why a red mineral was still to be found in that area. This is a strictly local myth, but it forms an episode of a national one: the conflict between Horus and Seth.

Nearly all the myths in Papyrus Jumilhac are localized retellings of core myths. The riverbanks, towns, and hills of the Jackal Nome become the setting for the burial of Osiris, the defeat of Seth, and the triumph of Horus and Isis. The same cycle of myths was linked with many other areas. An Early Dynastic royal tomb at Abydos was reinterpreted during the Middle Kingdom as the burial place of Osiris. By the 1st millennium BC, Isis was said to have buried parts of the dismembered body of Osiris in every Egyptian nome. The head was supposed to be buried in Busiris in the north and one leg on the island of Biga on Egypt's southern border. Each body part represented the whole and sanctified the region.

Striking topographical features such as a mound with ancient trees, or a gap in the cliffs that resembled the fabled mountains of the horizon, might begin a mythical association, but these associations were reinforced over periods of time by ritual actions. These might range from a few words spoken during a libation to elaborate re-enactments of mythemes with a cast of thousands. Once a holy place was linked with a core myth and became a place of pilgrimage it tended to attract other associations.

These associations might be fostered by artificial manipulation of the landscape. Mounds were built to become the primeval mound or the resting place of Osiris. Lakes or pools, such as the one in which the statue of Sobek-Ra and Amenhotep III was found, were dug in temple grounds. These were used to represent the primeval

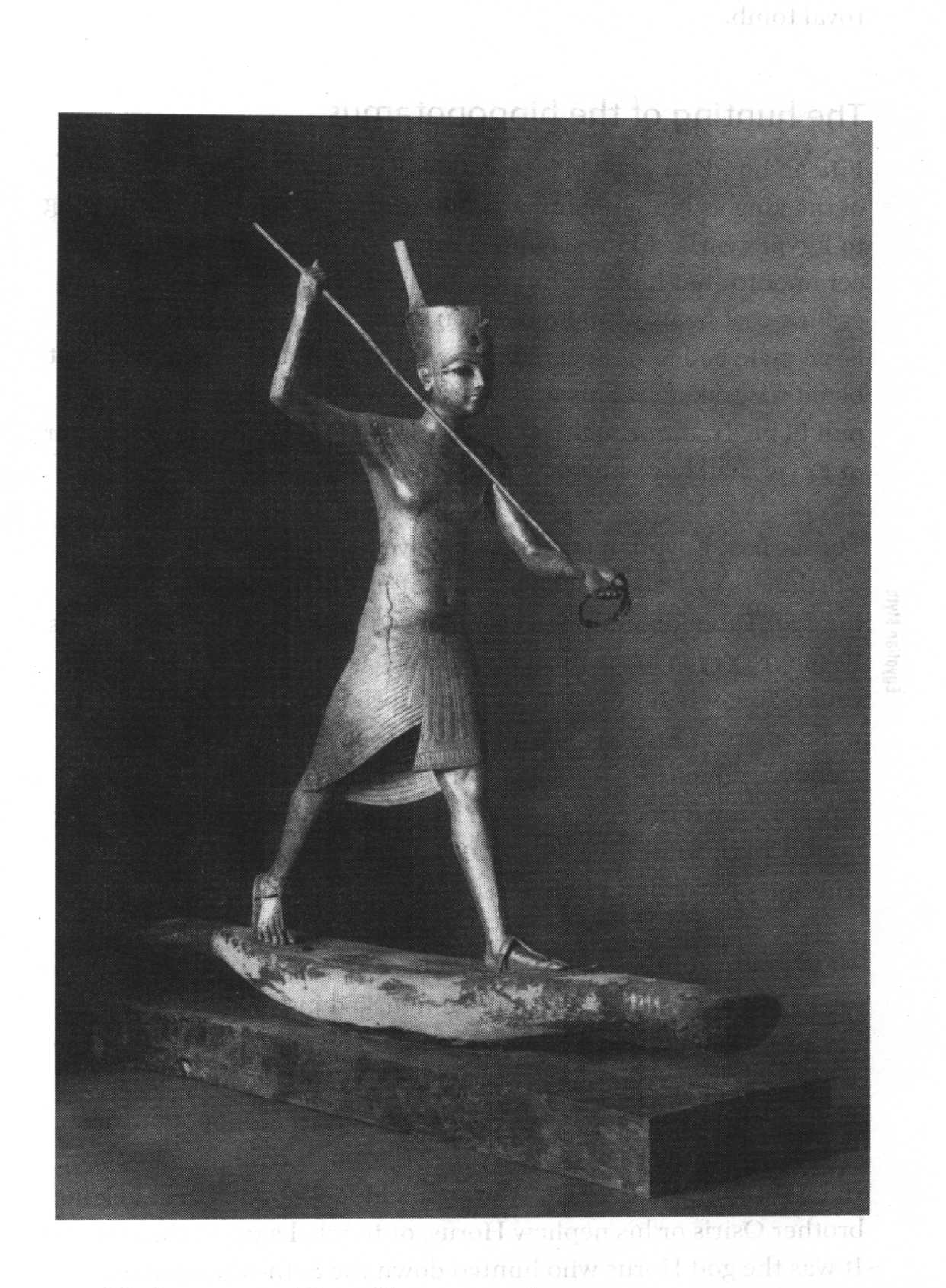
ocean or the site of the watery combat between Horus and Seth. Major temples had a symbiotic relationship with the government, so royal patronage was essential for such large-scale transformations. In the next chapter we will look at the connections between royalty and myth.

Chapter 6
Lord of the Two Lands: myths of nationhood

For many people the golden mask of Tutankhamun *is* the face of Ancient Egypt. Tutankhamun's brief reign (*c*.1336–1327 BC) marked the return to an orthodox model of kingship after the 'Great Heresy' of the Amarna Period. During that period King Akhenaten had replaced all national and local mythology with accounts of the creation of the world by his solar deity, Aten. This god seemed to create and rule without opposition. The dark myths of the murder of Osiris and the bloody war between order and chaos were banished.

Tutankhamun's burial treasures allude to a wide range of myths, including those based on conflict. A pair of gilded statuettes found inside a wooden shrine show the young king standing in a shallow boat made of papyrus stems. In the statuette in the picture, Tutankhamun wears the Red Crown of Lower Egypt (Figure 6). It was the crown and other key items of royal regalia that were thought to bestow godlike powers on a king. Wearing this crown, Tutankhamun has no need of rich robes or precious jewellery to emphasize his status.

The young king holds a harpoon in one hand and a coil of rope in the other. His pose is unusually active for a royal statue – Tutankhamun is in the very act of launching his harpoon. His intended prey was a male hippopotamus but this



6. Gilded statuette of Tutankhamun as a harpooner

was a creature too dangerous to depict in the confines of the *royal tomb.*

The hunting of the hippopotamus

Fifteen hundred years before Tutankhamun was buried, the motif of the king as hippopotamus hunter appeared on objects belonging to Egypt's earliest kings. Hippopotamus ivory was a highly prized commodity, but hunting hippopotami with copper weapons from easily upset boats would have been a very dangerous business. A large male had to be speared many times until it had lost sufficient blood to weaken it. This was the Ancient Egyptian equivalent of a bull fight. Tradition claimed that King Menes, the legendary uniter of Egypt, had been killed by a hippopotamus.

The earliest Egyptian leaders may have had to prove their worthiness by leading such hunts, but it is highly unlikely that the frail Tutankhamun was ever allowed near a real hippopotamus. Recent research by medical historians has suggested that the young king was hardly able to stand upright without the aid of a walking-stick. At some point the hippopotamus hunt became merely symbolic. Its principal purpose could be achieved by representing it in art or through ritualized actions such as 'cutting up the hippopotamus cake'. That purpose was to bring about the triumph of order over chaos.

Many characteristics of the hippopotamus associated them with the forces of chaos. By day, hippopotami lurked just under the surface like primeval monsters in the waters of chaos. By night, they came ashore to graze, trampling crops and anything else in their path. The males fought each other ferociously. Many hippopotami are pinkish-red and red was the colour of evil in Egyptian symbolism. In myth, Seth could take the form of a hippopotamus to attack his brother Osiris or his nephew Horus, or to rebel against the sun god. It was the god Horus who hunted down the Seth-hippopotamus and stabbed him with a magic harpoon in every part of his body.

This act echoed a myth in which Horus subdued the primeval ocean with his spear so that creation could begin.

The harpooner statuette shows Tutankhamun idealized as the golden Horus-king; the hero who will slay the chaos monster and save the world. In reality the odds in such a combat were in favour of the hippopotamus, as every Nile-dweller would have known. The Egyptians did not see the triumph of order as a foregone conclusion. The threat from chaos was very real and, as with the legend of Menes, the story would not always have a happy ending. Egyptian idealogy promoted the belief that the office of kingship was essential if civilization was to survive.

King and country

It seems ironic that the men who rebelled against the British crown and established a republic in America were so fond of Ancient Egyptian symbolism, since monarchy was the keystone of Egyptian society. History was thought of in terms of lists of past kings, sometimes arranged into dynasties. These lists had the practical purpose of naming the royal ancestors who ought to be honoured with offerings. They also created a continuous history for Egypt, going back to a remote era when Egypt was ruled directly by the creator sun god and then by a series of god-kings including Osiris and Horus. The reign of Horus served as a model for all subsequent kings. All loyal subjects were to be 'Followers of Horus' rather than 'Followers of Seth'.

The deeds of several Upper Egyptian kings of the late 4th millennium BC seem to have contributed to the legend of Menes the Uniter. On royal objects of this era the king can be represented as a hawk, a bull, or a lion overcoming enemies who seem to include the 'marsh people' of the north. By around 3100 BC the world's first large nation-state had been established. Local loyalties to kin groups, tribal chieftains, or town leaders were replaced by loyalty to a central government headed by a hereditary monarchy. How was

this achieved? The recent history of Africa has shown that such states cannot be sustained merely by superior force; a huge change in mental and emotional attitudes is needed.

The early kings seem to have used several methods. Firstly, they systematized writing and art to create a powerful imagery for their new country, rather as logos and trademarks are used to promote brands today. Secondly, the king entered into a relationship with all the local deities so that he became a religious leader for the whole country. Thirdly, the Egyptian elite promoted the concept of 'good authority', so that the central government was seen as part of the divine order.

The differences between north and south were celebrated rather than disguised by calling Egypt the 'Two Lands' and using paired symbols for Upper and Lower Egypt such as the White Crown and the Red Crown, the vulture and the cobra, the lily and the papyrus. Early royal annals are dominated by records of the king taking part in festivals or setting up statues in local temples. When a king celebrated his *heb sed* (jubilee festival) the gods of Upper and Lower Egypt, incarnate in their statues, gathered to validate his power.

Kings or gods?

The power of the king was based on divine authority, but were the kings themselves considered gods? Few statements about the 'divine nature' of the king would apply equally at all periods. The word *ntr* was frequently used in royal titles and statue cults were established for some living and dead kings. Coronation rituals and much of the royal regalia established the king as the earthly representative of the creator sun god who constantly renewed the world. This gave the king a position of authority in the divine hierarchy. Joseph Campbell suggested that when the Egyptian state was founded sacred kings became god-kings.[1] He argued that for much of the 3rd millennium BC 'mythic identification', in which the individuality of the king was absorbed into his sacred role, was

replaced by 'mythic inflation', in which the gods were absorbed into the ego of the king.

In religious art and literature the king could take on many mythological roles, such as that of Shu supporting the sky or the child Horus being suckled in the marshes by a cow goddess. Such scenes usually pre-date representations of the gods themselves performing such actions. The statue of Tutankhamun as Horus the Harpooner is earlier than any object, such as the Metternich Stela, which shows Horus himself spearing Seth in beast form. This royal dominance seems to have been a major factor in limiting the development of narrative myths and of art illustrating myth.

From the 5th Dynasty (*c.*2494–2345 BC) onwards, kings used the title 'Son of Ra' (see Box 8). The king was most often presented as a loving and dutiful son to deities. He interceded with them on behalf of humanity as no one else could. One type of 'sonship' was based on ritual identification with Horus. In Egyptian religion there were essentially two deities of this name. Horus the Elder was a cosmic falcon whose eyes were the sun and the moon. Horus, son of Isis, was the royal youth who fought Seth, avenged his father Osiris, and succeeded him as ruler of Egypt. The king could be linked with both these deities but by the Middle Kingdom the most dominant formulation was living king = Horus the Younger and dead king = Osiris. The Ramesseum Dramatic Papyrus contains the script for a royal ritual re-enacting the death and resurrection of Osiris and the triumph of Horus and his sons over Seth. It is not clear whether this Middle Kingdom ritual took place as part of the coronation of the new king or the funeral of the old king.

At this period, the concept of ritual identification with deities had spread through the elite class in funerary spells like those on the coffin of Gua, and even in healing and protective magic used during daily life. This may be why a more distinctive relationship between gods and kings developed. The late Middle Kingdom story cycle in Papyrus Westcar contains an early example of a 'royal birth myth'.

Box 8

ROYAL NAMES AND TITLES

In early times kings wrote their names inside a *serekh*, a rectangle surmounted by a falcon. This identified the king as the 'Horus in the palace'. Later, kings took a series of five names when they came to the throne. The first was the 'Horus name', the second was 'the Two Ladies name', and the third the 'Golden Horus' name. The names associated with Horus demonstrated that the king was powerful and all-conquering like the god Horus. The Two Ladies were Nekhbet and Wadjyt, the tutelary goddesses of Upper and Lower Egypt. This name emphasized the unifying role of the king.

The fourth name, known as the prenomen, was written inside a cartouche and introduced by the title *nsw-bity*. This literally means 'He of the sedge and the bee', another pair of symbols for Upper and Lower Egypt. It has also been interpreted as signifying the dual aspect of the king as an individual in time and as the eternal champion of *maat*. This name often incorporates the name of Ra, as in Neb-maat-Ra, 'Ra is the lord of *maat*', the prenomen of Amenhotep III.

The fifth name, known as the nomen, is written inside a cartouche and is introduced by the phrase 'Son of Ra'. The nomen is the family name by which Egyptian kings are still known, such as Amonhotep ('Amon is Gracious'), Thutmose ('Thoth is Born'), or Tutankhamun ('Living image of Amun'). These names sometimes reflect a dynasty's allegiance to the local god of their place of origin. For example, the family of Seti I ('He of Seth') is known to have come from a part of the eastern Delta where the cult of Seth was prominent.

The first three rulers of the 5th Dynasty are said to be the sons of Ra by a human woman. Their miraculous birth is attended by the divine sisters Isis and Nephthys, the frog-goddess Heqet, and the birth goddess, Meskhenet. The god Khnum gives health to each of the triplets as they are born.

Khnum was supposed to fashion each person's body and *ka*, a kind of vital force, on his potter's wheel. He is shown doing this in New Kingdom temple scenes illustrating the divine conception and birth of rulers. Reliefs in Luxor temple show Amun-Ra, King of the Gods, visiting a queen to beget a marvellous child who will reign as Amenhotep III (see Figure 3). When Amenhotep is born the deities who protected the solar child and the infant Horus gather to honour the baby prince and his mother.

The royal *ka* seems to have been regarded as an immortal power that dwelt in the body of each king, rather as the *ka* of a deity was thought to dwell in a cult statue. The term *ka* may derive from the Egyptian word for 'nourishment'. It also sounded like the word for 'bull' and connections of this kind were thought to be significant. The *ka* of the king sustained all his subjects. Each king was said to become the 'Bull of his Mother' in order to beget another form of himself who would succeed as the next king and the eternal champion of order.

Order versus chaos

A king was supposed to establish *maat* on earth by building temples, making offerings to the gods and the spirits of the dead, giving justice to the living, and defending the borders of Egypt. One text specifies that the role of the king was 'to put *maat* in the place of *isfet* (chaos)'. This implies that *isfet* was thought of as the natural state of affairs. The forces of chaos that the king had to subdue could be represented in iconography by foreigners, flocks of migratory birds, or various desert and marsh animals, such as the oryx and the hippopotamus. The harpooner statuette shows a

uraeus (a coiled cobra) attached to the king's crown. This fire-spitting cobra goddess was held to be the constant companion of every legitimate king. In myth, she was the lost eye of Ra who returned to the brow of the sun god and took on snake form to defeat his enemies.

Chaos was not presented as totally evil. Beings such as Nun, god of the chaotic primeval ocean, were honoured as 'fathers' of the creator. It is implied that some elements of chaos were neccessary for survival and had to be harnessed rather than eliminated. The energy and strength of the chaos god Seth were needed when the forces of order faced monsters such as the insatiable sea or the serpent Apophis. People were thought to have the capacity to choose between living in *maat* or *isfet*. In a spell in the Book of Two Ways (Coffin Text 1130) the creator states that he commanded people to do no wrong but their hearts disobeyed him. Like the creator, people had the power to make their own reality through what they thought. In the myth of 'The Destruction of Humanity' death comes into being because people rebel against the authority of 'King Ra'. Allusions to the dire consequences of rebellions against good authority are found throughout Egyptian literature.

A Middle Kingdom text known as the 'Loyalist Instruction' assigned two mythological roles to the reigning king: that of the creator sun god who gave light, water, and air to humanity, and that of the terrible lion goddess who devoured the enemies of order. This cross-gender identification is not as startling as it sounds since the lion goddess was a manifestation of the eye goddess who was originally part of the sun god. The Loyalist Instruction argued that strict organization was needed to defend the country, to exploit the inundation, and to grow enough food to allow the practice of crafts. The benefits of peace and prosperity were offered in return for the loss of individual or local freedoms. The elite class who helped the king to govern took a larger share of this prosperity than anyone else and so had a vested interest in continuing the system.

Nevertheless, some of the literature produced by and for this elite class is surprisingly critical of individual kings.

Kings behaving badly

In literature, it can be honest officials or learned priests and magicians who embody good authority rather than the king. Surviving Egyptian tales paint an unflattering picture of royal behaviour. In Papyrus Westcar, King Khufu gets rebuked by a peasant-magician for wanting to experiment on people. In the 'Tale of King Neferkare and Sasanet' the king has an illicit affair with a general. In Papyrus Vandier a king sacrifices a loyal subject to save himself and then seizes the dead man's wife and goods. In the 'Tale of the Two Brothers' a king steals another man's wife and allows his new queen to slaughter a sacred bull.

Classical writers who visited Egypt recounted even worse tales about ancient kings who raped their daughters or forced them to work as prostitutes in order to finance their building works. Some of these instances may arise because mythemes have been transposed into the human world, but it does appear that the Egyptians made a sharp distinction between the sanctity of the office and the fallibility of individual holders of that office. The same attitude seems to apply in narratives in which deities reign as kings and queens of Egypt.

The gods themselves are treated as existing in two types of time: a continuous present that can be accessed by ritual and in a remote past when the world was different. In the former, the gods are powerful cosmic forces whose interactions are not governed by petty human concerns. In the latter deities can appear as fallible beings with desires and emotions. In the myth of 'The Secret Name of Ra', the sun god is poisoned by Isis and tricked into giving her power over him. In 'The Destruction of Humanity' King Ra vacillates about what to do with rebellious humanity and is too distressed to remain on earth. In both these myths Ra asks a council

of gods for advice, just as an Egyptian king was expected to listen to his councillors' advice before choosing a course of action.

In a myth recorded in the late 1st millennium BC, the god Geb is burned by the cobra goddess on the crown after driving his father King Shu into exile and forcing his mother Tefnut to become his queen. The arcane doctrine of the 'Bull of his Mother' has been taken literally and turned into a story of incest and filial rebellion. The harpooner statuette of Tutankhamun illustrates an episode in another myth centred on the royal succession: the conflict between Horus and Seth over who should be king. For 3,000 years this was the primary national myth of Egypt. The reigning king was more closely identified with Horus than with any other deity, yet many different resolutions to the conflict are recorded. In the next chapter we will look in detail at one version of this myth and the diverse ways in which it has been interpreted.

Chapter 7
The big fight: conflict and reconciliation

Among the treasures of the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin is Papyrus Chester Beatty I. This papyrus scroll contains a number of literary works in poetry and prose, including a mythological narrative known as 'The Contendings of Horus and Seth' (Figure 7). The scroll was once part of a private library that belonged to a family who lived and worked in the royal necropolis of Western Thebes during the late New Kingdom. The Contendings is in the same hieratic handwriting as another text in Papyrus Chester Beatty I: a hymn to celebrate the accession of King Ramesses V (*c.*1156–1151 BC). The scribe who wrote out these two texts may also have composed them. Most of the incidents in the Contendings can be traced to earlier sources, but no other version of the myth combines them in the same way.

The Contendings is one of the longest narratives to survive from Ancient Egypt. It is also one of the most controversial. The text has been viewed as a crude entertainment, a clever satire, a sophisticated fiction, or a transformative myth. The Contendings has been used to shed light on the inauguration ceremonies of Egyptian kings, the unification of Egypt, the rise of royal power in the Middle Kingdom, the decline of royal authority in the late New Kingdom, gender issues, and the workings of the Egyptian legal system. It has been analysed, with diverse results, by Freudians,



7. Page from the story of 'The Contendings of Horus and Seth' in Papyrus Chester Beatty I

structuralists, and poststructuralists. These multiple interpretations of the Contendings show that there is no one standard reading of any Egyptian myth.[1]

A shocking story

Religious texts were normally composed in classic Middle Egyptian, but the Contendings is largely written in the colloquial language of the late New Kingdom. The deities in the story often speak in an informal way rather than in the flowery language of temple inscriptions. Nor do the protagonists behave in the decorous manner of deities in temple reliefs. In this version of Egypt's national myth, the sun god cannot make up his mind to do the right thing and sulks when contradicted; Horus, the model for all kings, cheats to win a contest and beheads his mother in a fit of temper; while Seth, the patron deity of some New Kingdom rulers, figures as a violent and lustful buffoon (see the summary in Box 9).

In the introduction to his translation of the Contendings, E. F. Wente argued that, 'The behaviour of some of the great gods is at points so shocking that it is hard to imagine that no humor was intended'.[2] Some scholars believe that the humorous element disqualifies the Contendings from being a myth and makes it mere entertainment; others have pointed out that providing meaningful entertainment is an important function of myths in many cultures.

Modern readers of the Contendings might assume that educated people in Western Thebes had ceased to believe in their deities, but there is plenty of archeological evidence to refute such an idea. Scribes who worked in the necropolis set up household altars, built and ran community shrines, participated in religious festivals, and decorated their own tombs with scenes of gods. It is most likely that any criticism in the text is aimed at the king and his representatives who chose to identify themselves with the sun god and his council of

Box 9

SUMMARY OF 'THE CONTENDINGS OF HORUS AND SETH'

Horus and Seth have been disturbing all Egypt with their quarrel over who should be king. The youthful Horus appears before a tribunal of deities to claim the throne of his dead father, Osiris. Several gods proclaim that Horus is in the right, but the All-Lord (creator sun god) is annoyed that the tribunal is making a decision without consulting him. Seth demands that the question be settled by single combat. Thoth writes a letter to Neith, asking for her advice. She writes back threatening to send the sky crashing to the ground if the throne isn't given to Horus. The tribunal agrees with Neith, but this makes the sun god furious. The sun god tells Horus that he is just a feeble boy, unfit to be a king. This makes the other gods angry and one of them insults the sun god.

The sun god is very upset. He lies down in his tent and refuses to get up until his daughter Hathor displays her genitals to him. Then the sun god tells Horus and Seth to speak for themselves. Seth argues that he should be king because he is the only god strong enough to defend the sun god from the chaos serpent who attacks him every day. The sun god wishes to give the throne to Seth, but other gods complain that Horus has a better claim. Isis becomes very angry and the gods try to pacify her. This in turn makes Seth angry. He threatens to kill one god each day unless Isis is banned from the tribunal.

The gods agree to meet on an island in the river. They order the divine ferryman, Nemty, not to ferry Isis to the island. Isis disguises herself as an old woman and bribes Nemty with a gold ring. Once on the island she transforms herself into a

beautiful young woman so that Seth will desire her. She spins Seth a sad story about how a stranger has deprived her young son of his cattle (which in Egyptian sounds like the word for inheritance). When Seth declares that this is infamous, Isis tells Seth that he has judged himself guilty. The other gods agree, but they do give in to Seth's demand that Nemty be horribly punished.

The morning and evening forms of the sun god declare that Horus should be crowned king, but Seth won't accept the verdict. He challenges Horus to a competition. They will both take the form of hippopotami and see who can stay submerged longest. Isis fears that Horus will drown, so she tries to spear Seth with her magic harpoon. First she hits Horus. When she harpoons Seth, he reminds her that they are brother and sister, and she lets him go. Horus leaps out of the water and beheads her. The sun god has Thoth heal Isis and orders that Horus be punished. Seth finds Horus sleeping and tears out and buries both of his eyes. Hathor discovers the blinded Horus and restores his eyes with gazelle milk. The buried eyes grow into lotuses.

The gods tell Horus and Seth to make peace and Seth invites Horus to stay in his house. During the night Seth tries to establish dominance by having sex with Horus, but Horus catches Seth's semen in his hand. He tells Isis, who cuts off his polluted hand and makes him a new one. Then she rubs the penis of Horus, gathers some of his semen and spreads it on the lettuce plants in Seth's garden. When Seth eats the lettuces he becomes pregnant by Horus. In front of the tribunal Seth mocks Horus for submitting to him. Horus responds by telling Thoth to call to his own and Seth's semen and see where it answers from. Seth's semen answers from

the water but the semen of Horus answers from inside Seth. Thoth summons the semen of Horus. It emerges from the head of Seth as a shining disc which Thoth places on his own head.

The tribunal declare that Horus is in the right, but Seth demands another contest: a race in boats made of stone. Seth makes a huge boat out of a mountaintop, but Horus makes his boat out of wood, painted to look like stone. The stone boat sinks, so Seth turns into a hippopotamus and attacks the other boat. Horus harpoons the Seth hippopotamus but the other gods tell him to stop. Horus sails to Sais to complain to Neith that justice still has not been done.

Thoth suggests that the tribunal write a letter to Osiris in the underworld asking for his opinion. When Osiris reads the letter he demands to know why Horus has been cheated of his birthright. Osiris reminds the tribunal that he was the one who sustained the world by creating barley and emmer wheat. The sun god responds that crops would have grown even if Osiris had never existed. This enrages Osiris. He sends a letter accusing the sun god of creating injustice. Osiris points out that the demons of the underworld do not fear any god or goddess and can fetch the hearts of all wrongdoers to face judgement. The gods acknowledge that this is true. Atum tells Isis to bring Seth to the tribunal in chains.

When Seth is made prisoner, he agrees that Horus should be king. Isis shouts with joy when her son is crowned. The sun god takes Seth to live with him in the sky as god of thunder storms. Heaven and earth rejoice to see Horus arise as king.

advisory deities. Horus's complaint that he has been struggling to obtain justice for 80 years would surely have struck a chord with the original audience, since some legal cases in Thebes are known to have dragged on for many years. Disputes about inheritances were common and surviving legal documents show how hard it was for widows and orphans (such as Isis and Horus) to obtain their rights even when the law was on their side.

The most shocking incidents in the story, such as the beheading of Isis or the pregnancy of Seth, are duplicated in some other sources, such as magical texts and calendars linking days to mythical events. Seth's attempted seduction or rape of his nephew Horus was a popular theme in Egyptian literature for over 2,000 years. The author of the Contendings displays a very wide-ranging knowledge of Egyptian myth, including localized myths of the kind later recorded in Papyrus Jumilhac.

Origins of a conflict

In the 19th century AD there were several main schools of thought about the origins of myths. Myths were seen as descriptions of forces of nature or of the movements of heavenly bodies; as garbled or romanticized history; or as evolving to explain archaic rituals. In the 20th century AD, myths were interpreted as reflecting aspects of the human mind and its ability to make sense of the world and to formulate language. All of these theories have been used at one time or another to explain the enmity between Horus and Seth.

In the early stages of Egyptian religion, Horus seems to have been worshipped as a sky god. The evidence for Seth as a god of sand and rain storms appears somewhat later, but it has led some scholars to see Horus and Seth as opposing forces of nature. The mytheme of Seth's theft of the eye of Horus has often been interpreted as an explanation of a lunar eclipse. The Egyptians certainly identified

Horus, or his eyes, with a variety of heavenly bodies such as the noon-day sun, the full moon, and the morning star. The theory that astronomical observations had a formative influence on Egyptian myth is currently popular.

The idea that myths transformed historical people into deities goes back to the Ancient Greeks. Plato, for example, assumed that the god Thoth had been a real person of the remote past. This theory has few contemporary adherents and is rarely proposed by Egyptologists for deities other than Horus and Seth. Recent archaeological evidence has been used to suggest that the Horus and Seth myth might have its origins in a conflict between the rulers of Nagada (local deity Seth) and Hierakonpolis (local deity Horus) in the late 4th millennium BC.[3] This is not to say that Horus and Seth were based on particular historical figures, only that a war fought in their names might have shaped the myths told about these deities.

Myth and history

The conflict between Horus and Seth was continually re-imagined in response to differing political situations. In most 2nd millennium BC versions of the myth, the emphasis is on ending the conflict through mediation. Peace is established when the 'Two Lords' are each given a realm to rule – the Black Land for Horus and the Red Land for Seth. Then the two gods will unite their strength to support the divine order. This seems to reflect a pragmatic approach to settling civil strife. However, after Egypt suffered a devastating series of invasions and occupations in the 1st millennium BC, the emphasis changed and the desired end of the conflict was usually the brutal execution of Seth and the annihilation of his followers.

The particular version recorded in the Contendings may have been influenced by, or even have been a commentary on, the troubled royal succession during the 12th century BC. Only a few years

before the story was written down, a prince who was the son of a queen called Isis had managed to gain the throne in spite of a murderous plot by one of his brothers. The Encomium in Papyrus Chester Beatty I acclaims Ramesses V as a Horus who has succeeded his father Osiris, but there is some evidence that his succession led to a civil war with his brother or nephew, Ramesses VI. The lives of the royal tomb-builders could be severely disrupted by such conflicts. They were bound to hope for a peaceful resolution to a succession crisis, such as the final division of power in the Contendings.

One Egyptologist has suggested that both the Encomium and the Contendings were composed to be recited during a festival at Thebes to celebrate the accession of Ramesses V.[4] The existence of the Ramesseum Dramatic Papyrus shows that validating kingship was a definite function of the Horus and Seth myth. Was royal ritual also its origin, or was the myth usurped by royalty to suit their own purposes? When asking which comes first, the myth or the ritual, each case has to be judged on its own merits. Often existing rituals, such as funerary rites, seem to have been gradually enhanced through association with myths.

Learning from myth

Many scholars have seen myth and ritual as virtually interchangeable, with myth as the 'thing spoken' and ritual as the 'thing done'. Claude Lévi-Strauss, the founder of structuralism, a method of interpreting and analysing aspects of culture and human experience, took a different view. He argued that while myths confront the universal problems and irreconcilable conflicts of the human condition, rituals gloss over them as though they do not exist. The royal and funerary rituals that incorporate elements of the Horus and Seth myth do seem to deny the reality of death and discord. In ritual, the new king is always Horus, the loving son, succeeding his father Osiris. By contrast, in the Contendings it proves almost impossible to choose between Horus and Seth, who

seem to represent paired but opposing concepts, such as culture and nature. The structuralist Robert Oden notes that 'there are binary oppositions with a vengence' in the Contendings. He argues that the structure of the tale articulates these oppositions without attempting to reconcile them. If so, this stands in contrast to many religious treatments of the Horus and Seth myth.

Freudians, who link myths to infantile sexual fantasies that shape the psyche, can find plenty to work with in the Contendings. Horus has to deal with a distant and passive father figure (Osiris), a violent and sexually abusive father figure (Seth), and a desired but domineering mother (Isis). In some versions, Horus establishes dominance by raping Isis rather than beheading her. The crowning of Horus could be interpreted as the adolescent Horus achieving maturity. Carl Jung saw Osiris as the part of the ego that had to give way or change in order for individuation to take place. In Jung's writings on Egyptian myth, Horus is variously said to represent light, humanity, the dawn of consciousness, and the perfected self.

Such psychoanalytical approaches can make ancient myths meaningful for modern people, but would they have had any validity for Egyptians of the 12th century BC? Like structuralism, these analyses ignore the known functions of a particular text, such as validating kingship, and the relationship of the myth being interpreted to the 'mythical history' of the culture in question. Interpreting the Contendings only in terms of family dynamics wrenches events from their setting. For example, the sexual nature of the relationship between Isis and Horus looks different if it is seen as part of a sequence of repeating mythical events.

The basic mytheme is 'goddess arouses god in order to create life'. When the murdered Osiris entered an inert state, Isis used her magic to sexually arouse him and conceive Horus. In some creation myths, the Hand Goddess aroused the penis of the primeval form of the sun god so that the first deities could be conceived and creation could begin. The means of creation could also involve the creator

fertilizing a plant, such as the primeval lotus or reed bed, with his 'seed'. In the Contendings, a lettuce is fertilized after Isis arouses Horus. This results in the birth of a solar disc, as in the first sunrise of creation. Everything that comes from the body of Horus, including his eyes, is capable of creating life. It marks him as the true heir of the creator sun god.

This is not to deny that basic truths about the human mind may have shaped the Horus and Seth myth. The Egyptians did interpret events symbolically, and there is even some evidence that they used their mythology to illuminate human behaviour. A New Kingdom text that comes from the same private library as Papyrus Chester Beatty I divides men into Followers of Seth and Followers of Horus. The 'Seth man' is characterized as hot-tempered, lustful, and over-emotional. The 'Horus man', on the other hand, has presumably learned to control his desires and emotions in order to act effectively. The text continues with a list of dream interpretations based on the 'personality type' of the dreamer.

The triumph of Horus

Acknowledging that the Egyptians used their mythology in sophisticated ways, the Egyptologist Michèle Broze has treated the Contendings as a subtle work of literature. She has pointed out that rather than being pointlessly repetitive, the text is structured by paired events that gradually establish the claim of Horus. There are two coronation scenes, one aborted and one successful; two deities (Neith and Osiris) are consulted like oracles; Isis undergoes two sets of transformations; the goddess Hathor reactivates two deities (the sun god and Horus). The two fights involving hippopotami form an interesting example of paired events with negative and positive values.

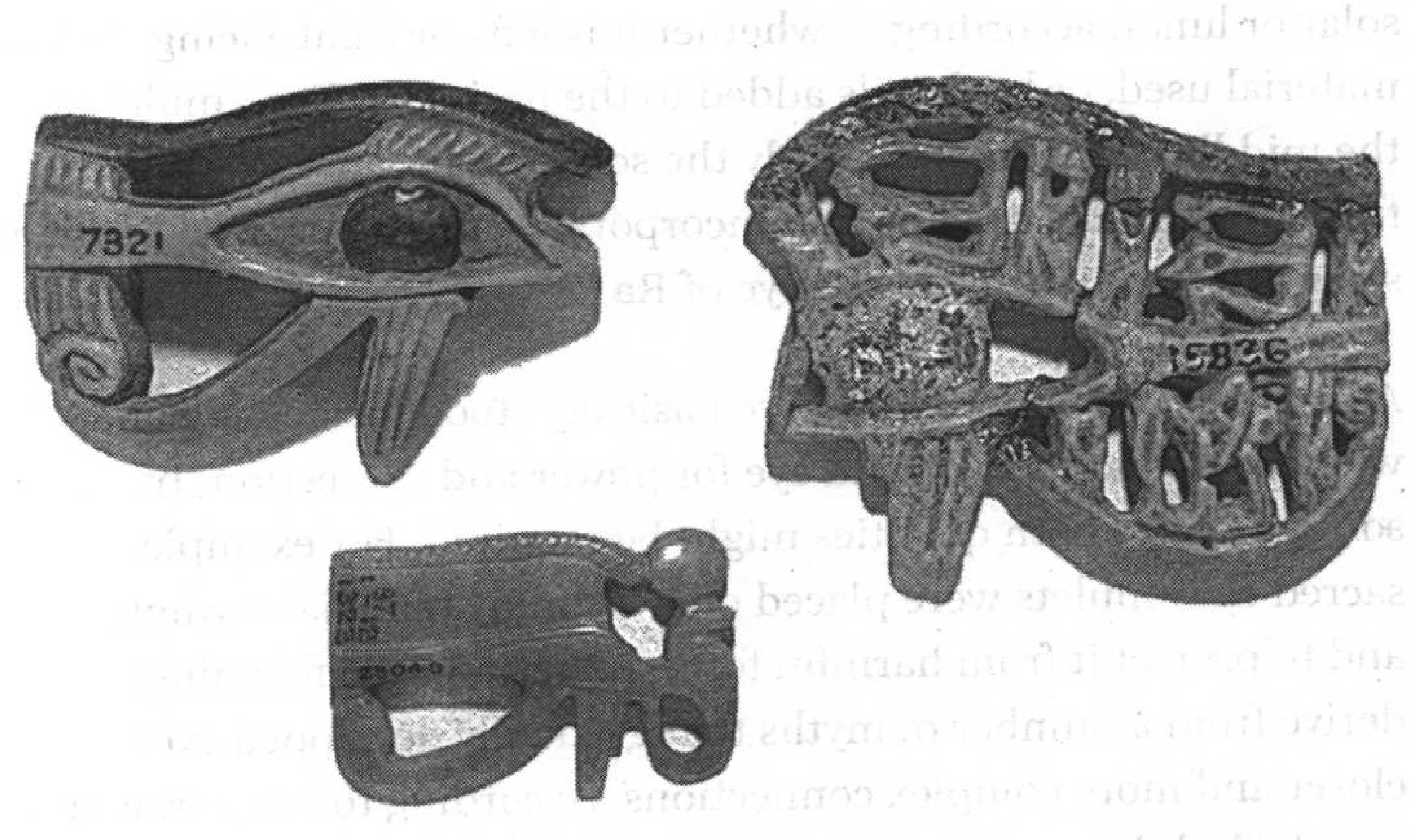
In the first incident, a kind of trial by ordeal, both deities take the form of a hippopotamus and plunge into the sea. When Horus becomes a creature associated with destruction and enters the

waters of chaos, he takes on chaotic qualities. He falls into a destructive rage, beheads his mother, a crime against the natural order of things, and fails to prove his case. In the second combat, only Seth is in hippopotamus form and Horus harpoons him from a boat. This would evoke the traditional image of the king as the champion of order defeating chaos, as in the harpooner statuette of Tutankhamun (Figure 6). From this point in the story, Horus's claim to be king is obviously justified.

This single text is so rich in interest that whole books have been written about it. The Contendings of Horus and Seth can stand on its own as an enjoyable tale, but it is far more meaningful when seen as part of Egyptian mythology as a whole. A particular quality of Egyptian myth is the way that everything interlocks. In the next chapter we will look at how the myths interacted with each other and how a single image could come to stand for a whole complex of myths.

Chapter 8
The eyes of heaven: pairs and sequences

The two most important elements in Egyptian religion, the solar cult and the Osiris cult, are brought together in the single image of the 'sacred eye'. Kings were buried wearing pairs of sacred eye bracelets. The incision wound on elite mummies was often covered with a metal plate bearing a sacred eye. In life and death ordinary people wore sacred eye amulets, such as the ones in Figure 8. The sacred eye spread from Egypt to other cultures and is one of the best known of Ancient Egyptian symbols today. A version of it is used by the American Association of Pharmacists as the emblem of their profession.



8. Three amulets representing lunar and solar eyes

The eye in the sky

The sacred eye contains elements of a human eye combined with the markings of a falcon. It is often referred to as the 'eye of Horus', the falcon god. Readers who have got this far will be unsurprised to learn that things are not as simple as that. For a start, Horus has more than one eye. When Horus is considered as a cosmic being, his right eye is equated with the sun or the morning star and his left eye with the moon or the evening star. The sun disc was also worshipped as the active power of Ra in the world, an all-seeing eye in the sky.

Many Egyptian goddesses, such as Tefnut, Hathor, Mut, Sekhmet, and Bastet, could take the role of the 'eye of Ra who defends her father Ra'. Like the eye of Horus, the eye of Ra could function separately and have mythical adventures on its own. When the eye of Ra returned to her father, he placed her on his forehead as the fire-spitting cobra who would defeat his enemies. She is the cobra we see on the crowns worn by Sobek-Ra and Amenhotep III (Figure 3) and Tutankhamun (Figure 6).

The eyes of Horus and the eye of Ra could all be shown as a sacred eye. It is sometimes possible to identify a sacred eye amulet as either solar or lunar, according to whether it is left- or right-facing, by the material used, or by details added to the basic eye. The amulet in the middle of Figure 8 is clearly the solar eye because it is made from bright red carnelian and incorporates a cobra crowned with a solar disc – two forms of the eye of Ra.

As amulets, the lunar Horus eye basically stood for healing and wholeness, and the solar Ra eye for power and protection. In some contexts both qualities might be required. For example, sacred eye amulets were placed on a mummy to make it whole and to protect it from harmful forces. These simple meanings derive from a number of myths that gradually developed ever closer and more complex connections. According to temperament, people find the connectivity of Egyptian myth fascinating or

infuriating. Readers who think that they might fall into the latter category should omit this chapter.

Ways of myth-making

Egyptian myths were not all generated at the dawn of history and handed down unchanged. Myth-making was a continuous process. There must have been generally understood rules governing this process, as there were for the creation of religious art. Important methods for bringing originally diverse elements together were 'word-linkage' and the arrangement of deities into family groups. We have already seen these used to merge creation myths in the Memphite Theology in Chapter 4. Through syncretism, the myths originally attached to one deity could be transferred to their divine 'partner', as with Ra and Sobek.

A fourth mechanism for change and development was to invent or adapt a mytheme so that it formed a pair with an existing mytheme or could be fitted into an existing sequence of parallel events. This allowed myths to be created specially to fulfil a variety of public and private functions. One example is the sequence based on the mytheme 'goddess arouses inert god' that we looked at in Chapter 7. Another is the series of divine children born from the era of creation down to historical times. The solar child was born in the primeval lotus and protected by the primeval cow; the Horus child was born in the papyrus thicket of Chemmis and protected by the wild cow of the marshes; rulers such as Amenhotep III were born through divine intervention and were shown being nursed by cow goddesses.

In the daily solar cycle, the sun could be thought of as a child emerging from the primeval waters or born to the cow goddess every morning. The solar child was important from early times, but the matching concept of a lunar child, who is also shown emerging from a lotus, does not seem to have been introduced until the end of

the New Kingdom. This kind of repetition was not just a literary device, it reflected the way that Egyptian intellectuals thought about time and causality.

History repeats itself

According to one Egyptian text, 'Everything that exists is eternal stability and eternal recurrence'. Paradoxically, stability was achieved by regular changes or transformations. Kingship, for example, was an eternal part of the divine order, but it functioned through a recurring pattern of the old king dying and becoming Osiris and the new king taking his place as Horus. Terrible events such as murder and rebellion were part of the pattern because of the continuing presence of chaos, but they would be balanced by the positive transformations that allowed the world to be renewed. As on the Metternich Stela, the divine child was always under threat but would always survive to triumph over the enemies of order.

Time could be thought of as going all the way back to the First Time like a straight line, and as going round in circles as key events repeated themselves in hourly, daily, monthly, or annual cycles. Egyptian creation texts, such as the Memphite Theology, are like personal timelines for creator deities. The most humanized mythical narratives belong to the remote period when the earth was directly ruled by a series of deities. Since they were set in the past their influence on the present was limited. When similar events recurred in works based on cyclical time, they were mainly expressed through images and the bringing together of 'constellations' of deities. Turning the solar cycle into too human or too specific a story might damage its power of 'eternal recurrence' and with it the whole workings of the universe. Nevertheless, it is possible to observe a long, slow process of link-building between the solar cycle and other elements of Egyptian myth. Looking at a few more examples of pairs and sequences may make this clearer.

Paired mythemes

I have listed eight pairs of mythemes involving divine eyes, or the heavenly bodies which can be associated with such eyes (see Box 10). To call these pairs alternative versions of a single myth would not be accurate. This is not a case of something happening *either* one way or another. It has, or will have, happened *both* ways.

The pattern for all future events was set during the First Time, the period when the universe was being created, so pairs often consist of an event that happened during the First Time and an event that is placed during the era when deities ruled the earth (as in pairs 1–2). In other pairs, one event seems to take place in linear time and the other in cyclical time (for example, pair 7). In the daily solar cycle, dawn is equivalent to the First Time and evening to the end of mythical history when the creator returns to chaos. Events set very early in mythical history often seem to have been invented quite late in Egypt's cultural history, since the peak of interest in the First Time, and the chaos that preceded it, was during the 1st millennium BC.

There are two main kinds of paired mythemes, which could be labelled symmetrical and non-symmetrical. When reduced to essentials, symmetrical pairs are identical events with different protagonists. For example, the summary 'deity loses his eye and gets it back', would apply to both Ra and Horus (pair 3). In non-symmetrical pairs at least one element is reversed, thus the eye of Ra is the means of both the creation and the destruction of humanity (pair 1). Each myth in a pair is enriched by knowledge of the other. Horus's role as an avatar of the sun god is made clear by the loss and return of his life-giving eye. Humanity's origin in tears of anger and sorrow foreshadows its eventual fate.

Once a pairing was established, there was often a transfer of imagery or actors between the two myths. From very early times,

Box 10

PAIRED EYE MYTHS

1

Humanity springs from tears of eye of the Ra-Atum

Humanity is destroyed by the eye of Ra

2

Eye of Ra retrieves Shu (and Tefnut) from primeval waters

Shu retrieves eye of Ra (Hathor-Tefnut) from distant desert

3

Ra loses his eye and regains it

Horus loses his eye and regains it

4

Thoth (or Shu) heals and returns the lost eye of Horus

Shu (or Thoth) transforms and returns the strayed eye of Ra

5

Ra reinvigorated by return of eye of Ra

Osiris regenerated through presentation of eye of Horus

6

Seth as black boar swallows eye of Horus (moon)

Nut, 'the sow', swallows the sun disc (eye of Ra)

7

Seth 'gives birth' to the solar or lunar disc

Nut gives birth to the sun in the morning

8

Seth tears out the eye or eyes of Horus

Horus tears off the testicles of Seth

the conciliatory god Thoth was credited with restoring the eye of Horus. In the original myth of the return of the Distant Goddess, the god who brought her back seems to have been Onuris or Onuris-Shu. Once this goddess became identified with the lost eye of Ra, symmetry demanded that Thoth become her chief restorer. Thoth was said to have adopted his baboon form to approach and pacify the angry goddess. By the end of the Middle Kingdom, an image of a baboon holding out a sacred eye could represent one or both of these mythemes. Later still, Shu was sometimes named as the god who had retrieved the eye of Horus from the hand of Seth.

Thoth's baboon form was particularly associated with his role as a moon god. Sacred eye amulets decorated with tiny troops of monkeys or baboons (for example, Figure 8, right) could evoke this lunar aspect and/or the narrative motif of the eye goddess escorted back to Egypt by deities in baboon form and welcomed by monkeys and other animals. The apes create a further visual link with the traditional image of the newly risen sun adored by a troop of baboons (see Figure 2a). When the lost eye returns, Osiris rises from the dead and the sun rises to drive away darkness.

Parallel events

The same mytheme can be part of several pairs or sequences. Its emphasis will change according to the other elements present. For example, Thoth returning the eye goddess to Ra can be paired with Thoth bringing Ra's gentle daughter Maat to join the sun god. The presentation of Maat to Ra can also be equated with the presentation of the eye of Horus to Osiris. In both cases, a god receives something that he needs in order to function. This is a literary equivalent to the varied deployment of symbols in works of art such as royal jewellery.

The paired mytheme 'deity loses eye and gets it back' can also form part of a long sequence of mutilations of deities (see Box 11). Mutilation was a fate particularly dreaded by Egyptians because

Box 11

MUTILATIONS SEQUENCE

Seth dismembers body of Osiris – body restored by Isis and Anubis

Seth tears apart eye of Horus – eye restored by Thoth

Seth tears out both eyes of Horus – eyes restored by Hathor or Isis

Horus tears off the testicles of Seth – testicles restored by Thoth

Horus beheads Isis – Thoth gives Isis a cow's head

Isis cuts off the hand/hands of Horus – Isis makes him new ones, or hands recovered by Sobek

Horus, Anubis, or Isis castrate and dismember Seth

Seth, Horus, and others mutilate Apophis and the Enemies of Ra

killing someone by beheading or dismemberment was thought to restrict their power in the afterlife. A standard way of punishing dead people and rendering them harmless was to destroy the eyes of their tomb statues or erase their faces in tomb paintings.

The most famous mutilation in Egyptian myth was the wounding of the eye or eyes of Horus. He was sometimes worshipped as a pair of deities, the benevolent Horus-with-eyes and the vengeful Horus-without-eyes. Like other terrible and inauspicious events, the mutilation of Horus is never directly shown in art and is rarely described in detail in literature. Seth always seems to be the perpetrator. Sometimes he is said to damage or rip the eyeball or pupil of Horus out with his finger. In the Contendings, Seth tears out both eyes and buries them in a secret place. Sometimes Seth is said to swallow the eye of Horus. In a few texts, the eye appears to be lost in the dark primeval ocean, a fate that may be borrowed

from the paired myth of the lost eye of Ra-Atum. To remove the divine eye is to remove light and hope and plunge the world into despair and darkness.

It became axiomatic that the eye of Horus was not just lost but divided into many pieces. In the lunar calendars used by temples the loss and restoration of the eye of Horus was equated with the waning and the waxing of the moon. Thoth was the deity usually given the role of putting the eye back together, even though one part remained missing. Through the magic of Thoth, the wounded eye of Horus became the *wedjat* (the complete or sound eye). The elements of the sacred eye could be used in the hieroglyphic script to write fractions: the pupil writing 1/4, the eyebrow 1/8, and so on. The parts of the eye add up to 63/64, with the missing part magically added by Thoth. These fractions were most often employed to measure grain, or the relative proportions of drugs to be used in medicinal prescriptions.

At some point, the story of the fate of the body of Osiris seems to have been manipulated to make it more similar to the fate of the eye of Horus. Originally, Isis had to search for the decomposed body of Osiris and restore it with her magic. Then the idea developed that Seth had ripped the body apart and scattered the pieces. Eventually, as we saw in Chapter 5, there was one body part for each of the 42 nomes of Egypt. Isis gathered the fragments, using magic to make a replacement for the one body part that remained missing.

The intact eye of Horus had the power to heal the living, bestow kingship, and make the dead whole again. The intact body of Osiris was credited with the power to make the Nile rise and the crops grow. The mutilations of Horus and Osiris seem to lead to increased power. Even the beheading of Isis had a positive result when she acquired the powers of the cow goddess with her new cow head. These mutilations seem like a violent version of the voluntary transformations the sun god underwent during his daily voyage through the skies above and below the earth.

The case of the mutilation of Seth is rather different. In the oldest sources (in which Seth and Horus are generally regarded as brothers rather than uncle and nephew), two pairs of life-giving circular objects, the eyes of Horus and the testicles of Seth, are damaged. Thoth has to heal both wounds so that the equilibrium can be restored. Then Seth, strongest of the gods, will join Horus the Harpooner, the eye of Ra, and many other warlike deities to defeat and dismember the ultimate enemy, the chaos serpent Apophis. This fits the pattern of mutilations as ultimately beneficial transformations. Later sources usually have Seth mutilated as a punishment for his crimes without any subsequent healing or making whole.

Papyrus Jumilhac contains several stories about the eyes of Horus and the body of Osiris localized to the Jackal Nome. In one, Seth is punished by Anubis for trying to tamper with the body of Osiris. The flesh of Seth is roasted so that the aroma reaches Ra in the sky. The skin of Seth in his panther form is cut off, branded, and worn as a cloak by Anubis. This myth provided an explanation for priests wearing leopard-skin cloaks during funerary rituals. By the Graeco-Roman Period, the body of Seth was said to have been divided into many parts after his defeat. One part was buried in each of the 42 nomes, forming negative counterparts to the body parts of Osiris.

Popular tales

The theme of mutilation is also found in some popular tales. In one New Kingdom story, a younger brother is jealous of his elder sibling, just as Seth was jealous of Osiris. The names of these two brothers, Maat and Gereg, are usually translated as Truth and Lies. Lies falsely accuses his brother of stealing an imaginary dagger and asks the Ennead to punish Truth by blinding him. After this is done, Lies tells his servants to abandon Truth where he will be torn to pieces by a pride of lions. Instead, they leave him in a thicket of reeds where he is found by the servants of a rich woman. She sleeps with Truth and conceives a son 'who was like the child of a god'.

When this son grows up he tricks Lies into pronouncing his own guilt, just as Seth is tricked in the Contendings. Lies is punished with five open wounds, which seems to mean that his ears and nose were cut off and his eyes were destroyed. Punishments of this kind were actually inflicted on corrupt officials during the New Kingdom.

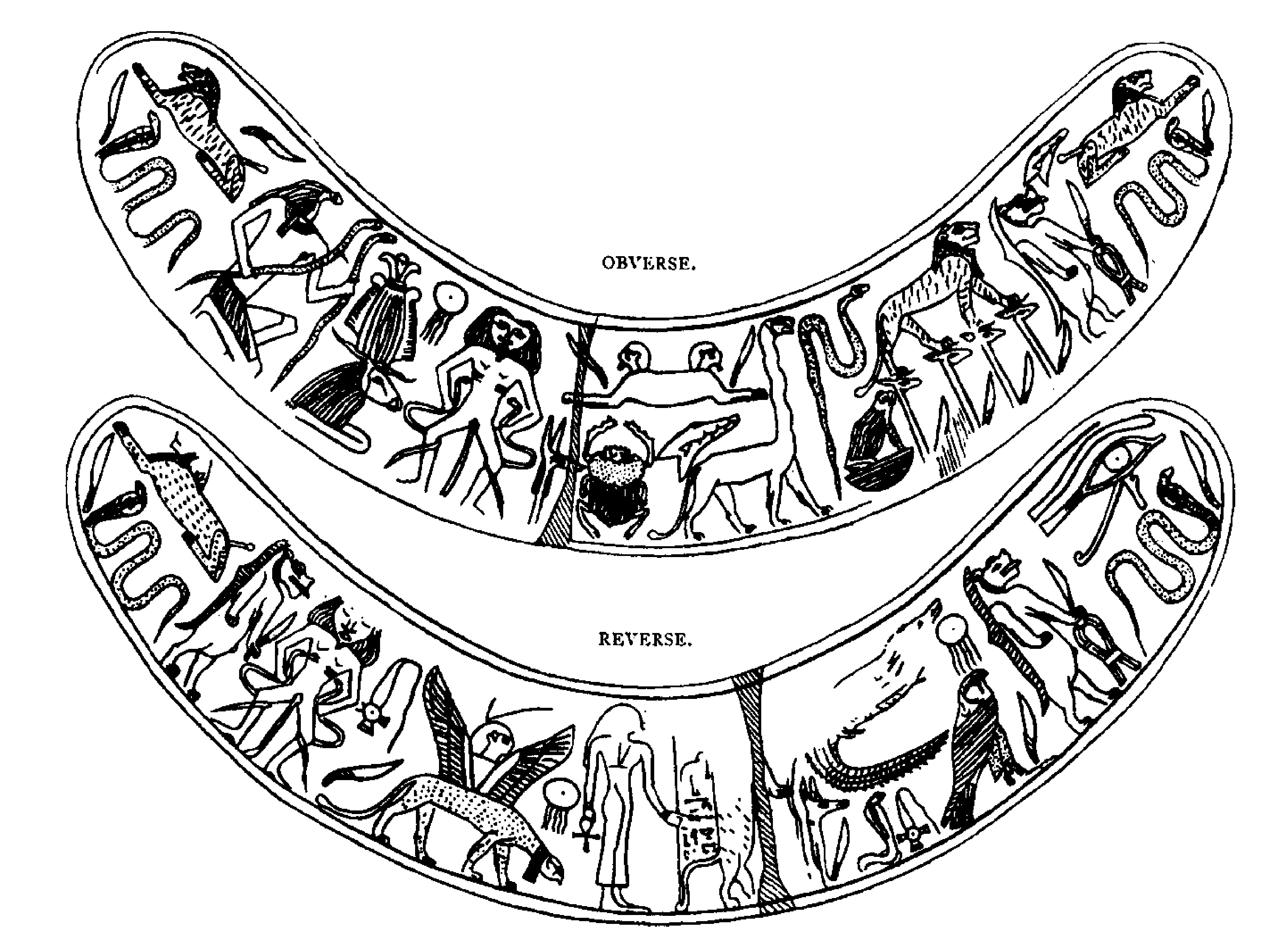
In another New Kingdom story featuring sibling rivalry, the elder brother is named Anpu (Anubis) and the younger brother is called Bata, the name of a deity sometimes equated with Seth. In 'The Tale of the Two Brothers', Bata cuts off his own penis after being falsely accused of raping his brother's wife. The Ennead creates a mate for Bata but she betrays him and marries a king of Egypt. Bata goes through a series of deaths while in different forms: the flower that contains his heart is destroyed, his bull form is slaughtered and eaten, and his tree form is chopped up and made into furniture. Eventually, Bata is reborn as the son of his former wife, the two brothers are reconciled, and just kingship is re-established.

'Truth and Lies' and 'The Tale of the Two Brothers' should probably not be regarded as disguised or garbled myths, but as stories in which repeating patterns of mythical events were played out by human or semi-human characters. Through ritual and magic, the lives and afterlives of actual Egyptians could also be made to conform with mythical events. How this happened is explored in our last two chapters.

Chapter 9
Personal myths: myth and popular religion

Myths are primarily communal rather than personal narratives. They reflect the values of an entire culture rather than the viewpoint of an individual. Privileged individuals may invent or modify myths but these contributions usually remain anonymous. Myths are often linked to rites benefiting the whole community or its leader, as in the re-enactment of the conflict of Horus and Seth to validate kingship. In Ancient Egypt, myths could also be applied in very personal ways to make a difference in individual lives.

People who were sick or in need of protection were ritually identified with deities in similar situations. Healers and *saw* (protection-makers) added to the stock of myths by combining standard characters and situations, such as 'an infant deity is poisoned' or 'a deity heals in return for a word of power', to suit a particular purpose. Through these spells the sufferings of individuals were transformed into incidents in the war between order and chaos. In some written spells the bare bones of a myth are used; in others they are fleshed out with vivid details and emotional dialogue. Some spells were summarized in visual form. One example is an ivory wand from Thebes made in the 18th century BC and now in the British Museum (Figure 9). Images and text on the wand link a particular person, the 'Lady of the House', Seneb, with solar mythology. Wands of this kind were weapons in a magical defence system for the vulnerable.[1]



9. Ivory protective wand of the Lady of the House, Seneb

Magical weapons

The objects known as apotropaic wands or magic knives are usually carved out of hippopotamus ivory; a material that was thought to imbue them with power. Seneb's wand is in the shape of a throwstick, a weapon used to kill or stun wild birds, which were classified as creatures of chaos. Apotropaic wands are incised with ferocious-looking figures who may brandish knives or torches. Inscribed examples call these figures gods, fighters, or protectors. According to one inscription, they come to protect by day and by night. Nearly all the inscribed wands were made for women or children. The same kinds of figures decorate a recently excavated birth-brick from Abydos.[2] Egyptian women feared death in childbirth and infant mortality rates were very high. The primary purpose of the wands was to protect pregnant or nursing women and their babies against hostile forces such as demons, ghosts, and sorcerers.

Some wands, judging by their worn or mended condition, were used many times to conjure up protectors for the living. Others were placed in tombs to exercise their protective function in the afterlife and assist the rebirth of the soul. Seneb's wand seems to have been in general use before an inscription was added on top of one of the figures to dedicate the wand to her protection (reverse side, centre).

Many of the images on Seneb's wand, such as the solar disc, the solar eye, the scarab beetle (the god of dawn), the spotted lions of the horizon, and the double sphinx that guards the entrance and exit to the underworld, are linked to the rebirth of the sun after its dangerous journey through the realms of darkness. As we saw in Chapter 8, there was a sequence of myths about the solar child, his divine mother, and the deities who helped to protect them from the forces of evil. The 'Enemies of Ra' are only represented on wands as severed heads, bound captives, or snakes in the process

of being stabbed, bitten, or crushed by fighter deities such as the lion-dwarf Aha (later called Bes). The same principle is found on the Metternich Stela, where the infant Horus is shown strangling and trampling the dangerous creatures who threaten him (Figure 2a).

The female figure near the middle of Seneb's wand (reverse side) is clearly a goddess because she holds out an *ankh*. It is likely that a spoken spell was used to identify Seneb temporarily with this goddess. One Middle Kingdom spell for easing childbirth has the doctor or midwife declaim three times, 'It is *Hathor* who is giving birth'. On the birth-brick from Abydos the human mother is shown with the turquoise-blue hair of a goddess. Like a king, Seneb could become part of a repeating pattern of mythical events. Her situation created a temporary link between the divine and human realms. This allowed supernatural powers to fight on behalf of the human mother and baby as if they were fighting for the divine mother and her child. The birth of that child was associated with the daily renewal of the cosmos at sunrise. Through the images on the wand, the fate of the cosmos was bound up with the fate of Seneb.

Images and stories

Although the wand of Seneb is around 1,400 years older than the Metternich Stela, they have many protective beings in common, such as lion deities, the hippopotamus goddess, and the frog goddess (compare Figures 2a-b and 9). The images on the Metternich Stela are complemented by narratives about a specific divine mother and child, Isis and Horus. In these embedded tales, the great goddess Isis experiences the troubles of an ordinary Egyptian woman. She is persecuted by an abusive relative, reduced to poverty, and struggles to obtain justice in a male-dominated system. In one story, Isis turns to the women of the nearest village for help. Versions like this were probably told by village storytellers and would surely have appealed to a female audience.

The texts on ivory wands are brief, but some of the images may stand for specific mythemes. A baboon holding a sacred eye is a common motif on the wands. As we have seen in Chapter 8, this motif can stand for Thoth returning the restored lunar eye to Horus or the pacified solar eye to Ra. The feline creatures shown on many wands could represent the Great Cat who traditionally slew the chaos monster Apophis under a tree at Heliopolis, or the wandering eye goddess in her unpacified form. Brutal images on some wands of cats or lions devouring foreigners may allude to the myth of the eye goddess being sent by Ra to destroy the evil portion of humanity.

It seems likely that stories about such 'fighter' deities were told as part of the protective ritual in which the wands were used. The women and children in need of protection were more likely to feel reassured if they knew something about the beings who were invoked to guard them. For much of Egyptian history, such 'old wives' tales' would have been considered too low in status to be recorded in writing. This may be why the dwarf god Bes and the hippopotamus goddess Taweret, who are commonly shown on objects used in daily life, scarcely feature in Egyptian literature. It is difficult to assess how much ordinary Egyptians knew about myth because of the dominance exercised by the state over religious art and language.

Popular religion

There were strict rules about what could be shown on religious buildings and objects, even those belonging to private people. These rules did gradually become less restrictive. During the 3rd millennium BC, deities were shown with kings but hardly ever with lesser people. Old Kingdom tombs were decorated with many scenes of daily life, but people were not shown in temples worshipping gods. However, Old Kingdom personal names often incorporated divine names (as in Nefer-seshem-Ra – 'Beautiful is the conduct of Ra'), and tomb inscriptions reveal that many elite

men and women served in temples as part-time priests and priestesses.

During the Middle Kingdom, the provincial governors who were also part-time high priests showed religious festivals on their tomb walls, but the deities involved were only represented by sacred objects. The Coffin Texts used in some elite burials of this era (see, for example, Figure 5) do form one of the major sources for Egyptian myth. In the late Middle Kingdom and the Second Intermediate Period, deities began to appear on expensive private objects, such as coffins, votive stelae, and the ivory wands. The wand of Seneb is particularly interesting because it resembles a royal Underworld Book reduced to two sets of images.

During the New Kingdom, it became generally acceptable for living people to be shown making offerings to divine statues or sacred animals, and for dead people to be shown in the presence of the gods of the underworld. In Egyptian polytheism everyone, whatever their age, gender, status, or occupation, could find a face of the divine that seemed relevant to them. Egyptian intellectuals searched for ways of expressing the relationship between the one creator god and the many other deities, but in most periods the worship of one deity does not seem to have been considered morally superior. The ideal pious Egyptian followed the ethical code of *maat* and honoured as many deities as possible by making offerings, taking part in festivals, serving as a part-time priest or priestess, and contributing to the repair or building of shrines.

Myth at Deir el-Medina

Much of our knowledge of popular religion comes from New Kingdom Deir el-Medina, the village of the royal tomb-builders. There was an unusually high literacy rate in this community. Its wealthier members are known to have owned mythical narratives,

such as the 'Contendings of Horus and Seth' (Figure 7). Some drawings by the villagers seem to illustrate fables, with animals as the main characters. These drawings are hundreds of years older than the earliest known written versions of such fables.

Through working on the royal tombs, the men of Deir el-Medina would have become familiar with the contents of 'secret' Underworld Books describing the mystic journey of the sun god. This knowledge was put to practical use. The epic mythical image of the Night Boat of Ra surviving the attacks of the Apophis serpent was invoked in written spells to deal with the snake and scorpion bites that were a hazard of working life. The most elaborate anti-venom spell found at Deir el-Medina includes 'The Secret Name of Ra', the story in which Isis poisons the sun god and tricks him into passing on the power that went with knowledge of his true name.

Myth-based calendars were used at Deir el-Medina. These seem to be adapted from temple calendars, but they had a similar function to horoscopes. They classify days or parts of days as lucky or unlucky according to which mythical events were believed to have taken place on them. According to the 'Cairo Calendar', the 22nd day of the first month of Akhet (the inundation season) was the mainly unlucky day on which Horus fought Seth, Isis harpooned Seth, and Horus became angry with his mother. These are the incidents described in detail in the Contendings. The 26th day of the third month of Akhet was the lucky day on which Horus and Seth were reconciled and the Black Land was given to Horus and the Red Land to Seth.

Some calendars include predictions of a surprisingly specific nature. An entry in Papyrus Sallier IV for the day on which the Ennead was created (through the sexual power of Atum) warns that a man born on this day will die while having sex. If the occupants of Deir el-Medina had taken these calendars too literally, the royal tombs would never have been finished. They may have been used as

a guide to when to take magical precautions, such as wearing a protective amulet.

One warning was against travelling on the day of the feast which 'Ra made to pacify Sekhmet'. This is an allusion to the story of Ra changing his mind after sending his eye in the form of the lion-goddess Sekhmet to destroy humanity. Another probable reference to this myth occurs on a stela dedicated by a draftsman called Neferabu who worked at Deir el-Medina in the 13th century BC.[3] This is one of a type known as penitential stelae because they are inscribed with prayers that ask a deity for forgiveness. In his inscription, Neferabu admits that he was too ignorant and stupid to know right from wrong. He committed an (unspecified) crime against a local cobra-goddess called Meretseger. She punished him with an affliction that he says was as painful as childbirth. Neferabu warns others that Meretseger will attack the guilty man like a savage lion, but she can be appeased by prayers and offerings. As an individual, Neferabu places himself among the guilty portion of humanity who deserved to be punished but, as in the myth, the creator was merciful and the avenging lion-goddess was transformed into a gracious goddess as welcome as 'a sweet breeze on a hot day'.

Amulets and bronzes

The Greeks and Romans frequently used mythological scenes to decorate secular objects. Most Egyptian art had a religious or magical purpose and mythological motifs were sparingly applied. In the Third Intermediate Period, there was a major increase in the number and type of non-royal objects incorporating such motifs. It is probably no coincidence that this change took place at a time when the priesthood was particularly powerful and Egypt was no longer united under strong kings.

Mythological scenes, such as the separation of the earth from the sky, started to appear in private funerary papyri and on coffins.

Amulets in the form of deities became much more common, and the most elaborate sacred eye amulets date from this era (see Figure 8). Some amulet types, such as Horus harpooning, or Isis and baby Horus in a papyrus thicket, depict scenes from myths. A pendant made for a Libyan chieftain who had settled in the Delta shows the sun god in his day boat attended by his daughters, Hathor and Maat. An inscription names the solar deity as 'Amun-Ra-Horakhty who sails the heavens to protect Sheshonq'.[4] The great solar cycle is treated as taking place to save one individual, rather as Christians have been encouraged to believe that Jesus Christ died for them personally.

During the Late and Graeco-Roman Periods, it became customary for wealthier individuals to dedicate bronze statuettes of deities in temples. Some of these votive bronzes comprise mythical tableaux such as the infant sun god emerging from the primeval lotus, or the creator bringing together the Ogdoad. The donors who paid for these bronzes were unlikely to choose a figure or scene that they knew nothing about. Attending temple festivals that included re-enactments or recitations of myths was one way that familiarity with myths could have been acquired.

Temples and festivals

The Metternich Stela and the Shabaqo Stone provide two examples of mythological texts displayed in temples. The narratives embedded in spells on the Metternich Stela may have been read aloud for sufferers from snake and scorpion bites who sought healing in the temple. The creation account in the Memphite Theology may have been read out during foundation ceremonies and at the New Year festival when the cosmos needed to be renewed. It is not clear how public such recitations were. There was no congregation to witness the daily ritual of offering and praise carried out in any Egyptian temple, as the inner areas of a temple could only be entered by people in a state of ritual purity. Access to the cult statue, in which the deity was

thought to reside, was restricted to the king and high-ranking priests and priestesses.

During major festivals, the cult image might be placed in a miniature boat and taken into areas of the temple complex that were accessible to the public or even on a visit to another temple. The festival of Sokar, a god of regeneration, involved dragging a boat shrine through the cemeteries of Memphis. During the festival of Min, a deity linked with agricultural fertility, the god's statue visited grain fields and lettuce gardens. These festivals gave the local population a rare opportunity to get close to a physical manifestation of a deity. Food and drink often seem to have been distributed to the crowd as part of the celebrations.

Scenes and inscriptions on the walls of the temple of Horus at Edfu have been interpreted as a 'mystery play' on the theme of the conflict between Horus and Seth. Some of the episodes, such as Horus harpooning Seth, seem to have been acted out on the temple lake. The crowd could have been given a role to play. At many temples there was a festival to celebrate the return of the wandering eye goddess to Egypt. Graffiti and rock inscriptions record that people went out into the desert to help bring home the goddess, as Thoth and Shu did in the myth. In the story of the 'Destruction of Humanity', Ra distracts the eye goddess from slaughtering the remainder of humanity by making her drunk on beer dyed to look like blood. Emulating the goddess by getting very drunk seems to have been a major feature of festivals celebrating Hathor, 'Lady of Intoxication'. The warning not to travel on the day of the feast that Ra made to transform Sekhmet into Hathor was probably a very sensible one.

At Bubastis in the Delta, the ferocious eye/lion goddess was transformed during a festival into a benign cat goddess of fertility. The Greek historian Herodotus (*c.*484–420 BC) has left us a vivid account of the drunkness, music-making, and bawdy good humour that were a part of this festival. He mentions that women sailing to

Box 12

SOME TEMPLE FESTIVALS LINKED TO MYTHS

Festival	***Temple***	***Myth***
Intoxication	**Mut temple, Karnak; Bubastis**	**Destruction of humanity**
Khoiak	**Abydos etc.**	**Death and resurrection of Osiris**
Opet	**Luxor**	**Union of hand goddess and creator/royal birth myth**
Potter's wheel	**Esna**	**Creation of life by Khnum**
Return	**Medamud etc.**	**Return of the Distant Goddess**
Victory	**Edfu**	**Triumph of Horus over Seth**

Some major festivals, such as the Beautiful Festival of the Wadi in Thebes, do not seem to have any associated myths. During this festival, the boat shrine of Amun-Ra visited the west bank to unite with Hathor, Lady of the Necropolis, and bring new life to the dead. A story in Papyrus Vandier in which a brave courtier voluntarily enters the realm of Hathor, queen of the underworld, in place of his king might be based on myth relating to this festival that has not survived in narrative form.

the festival would pull up their dresses to display their genitals to people on the bank – the same gesture that Hathor used in the Contendings to arouse the creator sun god from his torpor. These ordinary Egyptian women were merrily playing the most important of all goddess roles in myth: that of the partner who stimulated the creation and renewal of life.

Herodotus also claimed that Egyptian peasant women paraded a phallic puppet of Osiris around the local fields to make the crops grow. The most profound of all Egyptian festivals were those which re-enacted the death, burial, and resurrection of Osiris. The mythology of death, and its central place in Egyptian culture, must form the topic of our last chapter.

Chapter 10
The blessing of the mummy: the mythology of death

The culture and mythology of Ancient Greece has been the inspiration for all kinds of literature. Ancient Egypt has mainly inspired horror stories. Books and films about mummies coming back to life play on a universal fear of the dead. They also provide a safe way of working through such fear. An Egyptian ghost story inscribed on potsherds (*c.*1200 BC) may have been used as part of a spell to exorcize troublesome ghosts. The story tells how a brave high priest spends a night with an angry ghost called Nebusemekh. The high priest promises to transform Nebusemekh's miserable existence by rebuilding his damaged tomb and making regular offerings to his spirit. In this story it is the mummy we are meant to sympathize with. An Ancient Egyptian mummy was a symbol of death and life, fear and hope. This is best illustrated by a type of model mummy known as a corn mummy. The one in Figure 10 is made of river mud, the substance that above all others gave life to Egypt.

The hieroglyph for a recumbent mummy was used at the end of words for sleep and death, implying that both might be temporary states. The hieroglyph showing an upright mummy could be used at the end of words meaning transformation, statue, or likeness. An Egyptian mummy was not just a preserved corpse, it was the transformed image of the person it had once been. Acts such as covering a mummy with sweet-smelling resin or placing a

10. A corn mummy of the Late Period

golden mask over its face helped to turn it into a supernatural being.

At many periods mummies of both genders were identified with Osiris, the archetypal mummy of myth. Model mummies were given the attributes of Osiris, or the falcon head of another god of death and regeneration, Ptah-Sokar-Osiris. Our Late Period corn mummy has a face made of green wax. As ruler of the Underworld, Osiris was usually shown with either green or black skin. These colours came to be interpreted as symbols of agricultural fertility, but may originally have depicted putrefaction.

In the 'Contendings of Horus and Seth', Osiris points out that even stars die and enter his realm. The Contendings is full of sex and violence, but it does not violate the taboo on describing the most terrible of all mythological events: the murder of Osiris by his brother Seth. Attempts by Seth to destroy or steal the body of Osiris could be described in detail; the assault that led to Osiris becoming a corpse could not. In the Pyramid Texts of the Old Kingdom, Osiris, ruler of Egypt, is merely said to have been 'laid on his side'. He or his son bring a case before a divine tribunal. The tribunal rules that Osiris is justified in his complaint against Seth. Osiris is 'raised up', but his fate is to become the ruler of the underworld. It is his son, Horus who will be ruler of the living. Justice has been done, but the horror of untimely death is not denied. In a dialogue in the Book of the Dead (Spell 175), Osiris laments that he is forced to dwell in a grim place, divided from those he loves. The creator responds that Osiris has been compensated with the gift of power over all beings.

The Memphite Theology does state that Osiris was drowned, but quickly goes on to recount how Isis recovered his body from beneath the water. A New Kingdom hymn to Osiris as King of the Gods glosses over his death with a vague reference to the 'acts of the disturber' (Seth). It concentrates on how Isis found the lost body of Osiris and temporarily restored it to life so that she could conceive

Horus. In this strand of thought, the resurrection of Osiris is an erection that enables his seed to begin the creative process. This kind of sexual symbolism for the renewal of life was widespread. In some Underworld Books the light of the sun gives the mummies of the virtuous dead erections. Corn mummies are usually ithyphallic, and the penises of the elite dead, such as Tutankhamun, were mummified in an upright position.

In his book about Isis and Osiris, the Greek writer Plutarch (*c.*AD 46–126) reported a tradition that held that the penis was the one part of the dismembered body of Osiris which Isis had failed to find, so she had had to make him a false one. Plutarch gives the longest extant account of the murder of Osiris. He relates how jealous Typhon (Seth) tricked his brother Osiris into climbing into an open coffin. The coffin was sealed with molten metal and thrown into the Nile. It was swept out into the Mediterranean and eventually washed ashore in Byblos in the Lebanon. A miraculous tree grew up concealing the coffin. The king of Byblos had the tree cut down to make into a pillar for his palace. The grieving Isis traced the coffin to Byblós. She found work in the palace as a hairdresser and children's nurse so that she could be near her murdered husband. Eventually, Isis revealed her divinity to the king and queen, who gave her the coffin to take back to Egypt. There it was discovered by Seth, who tore the body of Osiris to pieces.

This account has no exact parallel in Egyptian, but Plutarch may have been drawing on local traditions and popular tales. At Herakleopolis, for example, the *ba* of the dead Osiris was supposed to emerge from a sacred tree. As early as the Middle Kingdom, Sobek was said to have crossed the Great Green (the Mediterranean) to search for the body of Osiris. The way in which Isis is reduced to working as a servant is similar to her plight in stories about the infancy of Horus inscribed on the Metternich Stela. In all these narratives, Isis is portrayed as experiencing anguish, loneliness, and fear for the future like any human widow. These emotions were also given voice in poetic laments that were

recited or sung by women playing the roles of Isis and her sister Nephthys at funerals and Osiris festivals.

Funerals and festivals

In the Pyramid Texts, dead kings were 'raised up' like Osiris. This identification with the fate of Osiris spread through the elite class until any dead person could be referred to as 'the Osiris so and so'. By the New Kingdom many elements of embalming and funeral rituals were associated, via words, gestures, or images, with the myth of Osiris. Anubis was said to have turned the body of Osiris into the first mummy, which was protected by the magic charms of Thoth. Scenes on funerary stelae, coffins, or tomb walls show the deceased attended by a figure with the jackal-head of Anubis. Sometimes this appears to be a priest wearing a jackal-mask, sometimes the figure is named as the god himself. The 'Books of Breathing', placed in burials from the 4th century BC onwards, were said to have been written by Isis and Thoth for use by Osiris.

In funeral processions the son of the deceased or a funerary priest played the role of Horus giving his father a new lease of life in the underworld. Offerings made to the dead were equated with the life-giving eye of Horus that revived Osiris. The two weeping women who kept a vigil over the mummy and accompanied the cortège were identified as the 'Two Kites': Nephthys and Isis mourning their lost brother/husband. These identifications have led to spirited arguments over whether such rites were designed to fit existing myths, or whether elements of the myths arose to explain archaic funerary rituals. Probably sometimes the myth came first and sometimes the ritual, but this answer is not acceptable to proponents of the opposing schools who are as difficult to reconcile as Horus and Seth.

Some Egyptians set up cenotaphs or funerary stelae, or buried small mummiform figurines of themselves in the great cemetery and pilgrimage centre of Abydos. This enabled their spirits to take part

in the annual festival of Osiris, in which the god's death and resurrection were partially re-enacted. Inscriptions left at Abydos by Middle Kingdom royal officials make it clear that crowds took part in a symbolic combat. A boat shrine containing an image of the god travelled from his palace (temple) to his 'tomb' and back again. Along the way, the god was attacked by enemies who had to be vigorously repulsed. Accounts of similar festivals of the 1st millennium BC claim that people were injured or even killed in such combats.

By this period, most major temples had a 'tomb' of Osiris in their precincts where the local populace could dedicate corn mummies or figurines of the god by burying them in miniature tomb-chambers. Temple texts describe goddesses making mummiform figures to magically assist Osiris to rise again. Actual corn mummies, like the one in Figure 10, were made out of mud or sand mixed with seeds of barley or emmer-wheat. These mummies were sometimes buried in ravines on the edge of the desert. When they were watered by a flash flood or a rain storm, the seeds would grow and life would come out of death.[1]

From at least as early as the Middle Kingdom, the death and regeneration of Osiris had been specifically linked to the annual cycle of the sowing and harvesting of food crops. Barley was said to spring from the ribs of his body, and the donkies who threshed corn with their hooves and carried grain on their backs were reviled as creatures of Seth. The use of the *wedjat* eye measure for grain ties in with the idea that crops came from the body of Osiris after it was regenerated through the presentation of the eye of Horus. Since bread made from corn and beer made from barley were the basic foodstuffs for all Egyptians, the regeneration of Osiris was important to the whole nation.

From the New Kingdom onwards, Osiris beds (wooden outlines of the god filled with soil) and corn mummies were also placed in tombs. They were sometimes watered during the funeral so that the

seeds would sprout after the tomb was closed. Such symbolism helped to incorporate the human dead in a great cycle of death and regeneration that encompassed all created beings and things. The human dead were also expected to play an active role in the maintenance of the cycle initiated by the creator.

An awfully big adventure

Peter Pan's description of death as 'an awfully big adventure' would have made sense to any Ancient Egyptian. People like the physician Gua expected to face many dangers in the transitional period after death. As one of the wealthy elite, he could afford decorated and inscribed burial equipment that would help him to deal with these dangers. Like deities, the dead were thought to have a variety of manifestations, so that they could be present in several places and bodies at once. While Gua's mummy lay protected in its set of coffins, his bird-like *ba* would travel through the *duat*. Gua had maps so that he could follow the route taken by the sun god on his nightly voyage (Figure 5) and spells to get him past guardian demons and to persuade divine ferrymen to take him where he needed to go.

The spell collection known as the Coffin Texts resembles a 'Worst Case Scenario Handbook' for the afterlife. The dead were afraid of suffering thirst and hunger, of being lost in darkness, attacked by snakes, burned by divine fire, caught and dismembered by demons, or forced to walk upside-down eating excrement and drinking urine. Most of these vividly imagined horrors could be avoided through mythological role-playing. A deceased person such as Gua could claim to be returning the lost eye of Horus like Thoth, supporting the sky like Shu, or repelling the Apophis monster from the sun boat like Seth. A great variety of such transitory identifications were used to give the deceased the power or knowledge they were thought to need in a particular situation. As deities succeeded in their divine travels, so would the deceased.

By the New Kingdom, the more compact spell collection now known as the Book of the Dead had replaced the Coffin Texts. In the Book of the Dead, prominence was given to the ordeal of judgement before the divine tribunal. The 42 judges sat in the throneroom of Osiris, the Hall of the Double Maat. The deceased had to suffer the scrutiny of this divine tribunal, as Osiris and Horus had once done. After the deceased had made a declaration of innocence, his or her heart was weighed against an image of Maat, the goddess of Truth. Like Ra, the virtuous were thought to carry Maat in their hearts. Bearing in mind the difficulty that even gods had in obtaining justice, the dead were allowed to use magic. A scarab carved with a spell that stopped the heart from reporting any evil it contained might be placed on or in a mummy's chest. The desired verdict was to be found 'true of voice' as Osiris had been. Like Osiris, the virtuous dead could not return to their old life on earth. They had to take on new forms and dwell in new realms.

Ultimate destinations

In the Coffin Texts, the deceased might be imagined as living in the Field of Reeds where corn grew to giant size, receiving all good things in the Field of Offerings, dwelling with Thoth in the Mansion of the Moon, or joining the retinue of the great goddess Hathor. Coffin Text 1130 describes an entire cycle from the creation of the world by the 'Lord of All' to its ending when the creator will become at one with the 'Inert One' (Osiris). It finishes by promising that anyone who knows this spell will exist like Osiris in the underworld and Ra in the east, unharmed by divine fire. Resting with Osiris and travelling with Ra were the two main fates of the 'justified' dead.

An early belief linking the spirits of the dead with the circumpolar stars implies a fear of entering the realm of Osiris. These stars were the only ones that did not periodically set below the horizon and 'rest with Osiris'. In the 'Contendings of Horus and Seth', the court of Osiris is peopled with terrifying messengers of death. Osiris claims that Maat has been forced to come and live with him because

Egypt has become corrupt. From the Old Kingdom to the Roman Period, it is possible to find Egyptian texts which stress that a happy afterlife was dependent on ethical behaviour rather than on being able to afford the best tomb and funerary equipment.

This point was graphically made in a story that was probably composed in the late 1st millennium BC. It tells how a prince called Setna watches two funeral processions, one of a rich man who is going to be buried with the best of everything and one of a poor man who will be dumped in the desert with no burial goods at all. Setna's son uses magic to take his father into the underworld to find out the fate of the two men. Both are judged in the court of Osiris. The rich man is found to have been wicked and selfish, and is condemned to eternal torture. The poor man is judged to have lived a good life. He is given all the rich man's burial goods, which help him to become a blessed spirit in the following of Osiris.

As this ethical view of the afterlife gained in popularity, Osiris and Isis became less ambiguous figures in myth. Osiris developed into the good ruler, the embodiment of injured innocence and ultimate justice. Isis became the perfect wife and mother, taking on the task of saving all humanity as she had once saved her husband and son from extinction.

All in the same boat

The emphasis on family loyalties in the myths of Osiris, Isis, and Horus is a pointer to the way that ordinary Egyptians thought about their dead. Everyone who died was a potential *akh*, a transfigured spirit with semi-divine powers. Letters written to dead people make it clear that individuals were thought to retain their personalities and family ties beyond the grave. The passage in the Contendings in which the dead Osiris helps his son to gain the throne reflects the way that Egyptians expected their dead relatives to use their power and influence to assist family members.

Box 13

UNDERWORLD BOOKS

The Pyramid Texts (24th century BC onwards), the Coffin Texts (*c.*22nd century BC onwards), and the Book of the Dead (16th century BC onwards) are diverse collections of funerary spells. No two copies were the same. The illustrated Underworld Books were complete compositions centred on the voyages of the sun god. The major Underworld Books copied onto the walls and ceilings of royal tombs and cenotaphs include:

Amduat **('What is in the Underworld'), 15th century BC or earlier**
The sun god and his crew journey through the twelve hours of darkness.

Litany of Ra**, 15th century BC**
An invocation of the 75 forms of the sun god in the underworld.

Book of Gates**, 14th century BC or earlier**
The sun god, Sia (creative thought), and Heka (magic) journey through the twelve gates of the underworld.

Books of Night and Day**, 14th century BC**
The sun god and his crew travel through the body of the sky goddess, Nut.

Book of Caverns**, 13th century BC**
The sun god journeys through the twelve caverns of the underworld to unite with Osiris.

Book of the Earth**, 13th century BC**
The transformations of the sun god in the underworld.

Many of these books were later adapted for use on non-royal tomb walls, coffins, and funerary papyri. Some of the underworld imagery may have influenced early Christian ideas about hell.

Pharaonic culture, on the other hand, was dependent on Egyptians putting king and country before family loyalties. In the funerary texts associated with the solar cult, the dead are treated as part of the larger society of Egypt and the divine order. Dead people were divided into 'Enemies of Ra' and 'Excellent spirits of Ra'. The Enemies of Ra feature in the Underworld Books on the walls of royal tombs being beheaded, burned, or boiled alive.

In these Underworld Books even the most powerful kings appear in merely supporting roles (see Box 13). Their fate after death is subsumed in the fate of the night sun as he travels the river of the underworld in his boat. The renewal of the cosmos depended on the crew of the sun boat. One name for this vessel was the 'Boat of Millions'. From the Middle Kingdom onwards, the non-royal dead could aspire to join this crew and take part in the vital work of sailing and defending the boat from dusk to dawn. There were funerary spells for 'Getting aboard the Boat of Ra' and for 'Becoming the swiftest rower in the Boat of Ra'. Illustrated spells show deceased people taking on the roles of mighty deities such as Seth or the eye goddess in order to slay the chaos monsters who threatened the sun boat. The afterlife became an eternal voyage, with humanity literally all in the same boat.

The light shed by the sun god as he passed through the underworld was said to waken the mummies of the justified dead from their sleep-like state. Poignantly, the light only lasted for a single hour, but for the dead this apparently seemed like a whole lifetime spent in the Field of Reeds. Several realities are posited, operating on different timescales.

Some Underworld Books revealed the 'secret knowledge' that Ra and Osiris, life and death, were really one. The two gods merged in the mid-point of the night and the cycle of death and regeneration began again. Dawn, the beautiful moment celebrated by objects as diverse as the majestic obelisk known as Cleopatra's Needle and the wand of the housewife, Seneb, would bring the renewal of life.

Notes

Chapter 1

1. For more on obelisks, see Labib Habachi, *The Obelisks of Egypt: Skyscrapers of the Past* (Cairo, 1984) and A. Noakes, *Cleopatra's Needles* (London, 1962).
2. All the quotations are from A. H. Gardiner, 'Hymns to Sobek in a Ramesseum Papyrus', *Revue d'Egyptologie* 11, 1957: 43–56. Despite his scornful attitude, Gardiner was a pioneering translator who made many important contributions to the study of Egyptian myth.

Chapter 2

1. For the history of the Metternich Stela, see N. E. Scott in *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, April 1951, pp. 201–17, and for its texts see C. E. Sander-Hansen, *Die Texte der Metternich Stele* (Copenhagen, 1956) and J. F. Borghouts, *Ancient Egyptian Magical Texts* (Leiden, 1978).

Chapter 3

1. This statue (no. 107), and other finds from the temple of Sobek of Sumenu, are described in J. Romano, *The Luxor Museum of Ancient Egyptian Art* (Cairo, 1979).

Chapter 4

1. A full English translation of the inscriptions can be found in M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. I, pp. 51–7.

2. K. Sethe, in *Das 'Denkmal memphitischer Theologie' der Schabakostein des Britischen Museums* (Leipzig, 1928) and H. Junker, in *Die Götterlehre von Memphis* (Berlin, 1940).

Chapter 5

1. For more information on the coffins of Gua, go to *www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/compass.*
2. The only full translation is J. Vandier, *Le Papyrus Jumilhac* (Paris, 1961), but some sections are translated in an appendix to S. Tower Hollis, *The Ancient Egyptian 'Tale of Two Brothers': The Oldest Fairy Tale in the World* (Norman and London, 1990).

Chapter 6

1. In Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God: Oriental Mythology* (New York, 1962), pp. 49–102.

Chapter 7

1. For a selection of these interpretations, see the works listed in Further reading and also S. A. Allam, 'Legal Aspects in the "Contendings of Horus and Seth"', in *Studies in Pharaonic Religion and Society in Honour of J. Gwyn Griffiths*, ed. A. B. Lloyd (London, 1992), pp. 137–45; M. Broze, *Mythe et roman en Égypte ancienne; Les aventures d'Horus et Seth dans le papyrus Chester Beatty I* (Leuven, 1996); F. Junge, 'Mythos und Literarizität. Die Geschichte vom Streit der Götter Horus und Seth', in *Quaerentes Scientiam: Festgabe für Wolfhart Westendorf*, ed. H. Behlmer (Göttingen, 1994), pp. 83–101; J. Spiegel, *Die Erzählung vom Streite des Horus und Seth in Pap. Beatty I als Literaturwerk* (Glückstadt, 1937); D. Sweeney, 'Gender and Conversational Tactics in *The Contendings of Horus and Seth*', *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, 88 (2002): 141–62.
2. In W. K. Simpson (ed.), *The Literature of Ancient Egypt* (New Haven and London, 1972), p. 108.
3. Rock drawings and inscriptions are published in J. C. Darnell, *Theban Desert Road Survey in the Egyptian Desert* (Chicago, 2002).

4. U. Verhoeven, 'Eine historischer "Sitz in Leben" für den Erzählung von Horus und Seth des Papyrus Chester Beatty I', in *Wege öffnen. Festschrift für Rolf Grundlach*, ed. M. Schade-Busch (Wiesbaden, 1996), pp. 361–3.

Chapter 9

1. For more on the wands and how they were used, see F. Legge, 'The Magic Ivories of the Middle Empire', *Proceedings of the Society for Biblical Archaeology*, May 1905: 130–52; and G. Pinch, *Magic in Ancient Egypt* (London, 1994).
2. The bricks were used to raise and support women during childbirth. See J. Wegner, 'A decorated birth-brick from South Abydos', *Egyptian Archaeology*, 21, autumn 2002: 3–4.
3. The stela of Neferabu and several other texts from Deir el-Medina mentioned in this book are translated by A. G. McDowell in *Village Life in Ancient Egypt: Laundry Lists and Love Songs* (New York, 1999).
4. This jewel was buried with King Sheshonq II at Tanis. See F. Tiradritti (ed.), *The Cairo Museum Masterpieces of Egyptian Art* (London, 1998), pp. 330, 332–3.

Chapter 10

1. For more on corn mummies and related objects, see M. Raven, 'Corn mummies', *Oudheidkundige Mededelingen uit het Rijksmuseum te Leiden*, 63, 1982: 7–38; and A. M. J. Tooley, 'Osiris Bricks', *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, 82, 1996: 167–79.

Further reading

Translations of Egyptian myths

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Timeline

(All dates are approximate until the 7th century BC)

Predynastic Period, 5000–3200 BC
Rock drawings
Settlement of Nile Valley
Rise of Upper Egyptian kings

Protodynastic Period, 3200–3100 BC (Dynasty 0)
Creation of hieroglyphic script
Unification of Egypt and founding of Memphis (Dynasty 0)

Early Dynastic Period, 3100–2686 BC (Dynasties 1–3)
First connected texts in hieroglyphs

Old Kingdom, 2686–2181 BC (Dynasties 3–6)
Massive royal pyramids built at Giza and Saqqara (Dynasties 3–4)
Solar temples built (Dynasty 5)
Pyramid Texts inscribed inside pyramids (Dynasties 5–6)

First Intermediate Period, 2181–2055 BC (Dynasties 7–11)
Egypt split into warring regions
Coffin Texts used in burials of regional elite

Middle Kingdom, 2055–1650 BC (Dynasties 11–13)

Egypt reunited by Nebhepetre Mentuhotep (Dynasty 11)

Egypt becomes a major power in the Near East (Dynasty 12)

Golden age of Egyptian literature; first surviving stories and Instruction Texts written in hieratic

Key objects: Coffin of Gua and wand of Seneb.

Second Intermediate Period, 1650–1550 BC (Dynasties 13–17)

Egypt divided after foreign incursions

First copies of the Book of the Dead (Dynasty 17)

New Kingdom, 1550–1069 BC (Dynasties 18–20)

Egypt reunited and gains an empire in the Near East (Dynasty 18)

Most cult temples rebuilt. Rise of the temple of Amun at Karnak (Dynasties 18–20)

Aten briefly replaces all other deities in the Amarna Period. Polytheism restored under Tutankhamun (late Dynasty 18)

Long, prosperous reign of Ramesses II (Dynasty 19)

Underworld Books decorate royal tombs in the Valley of the Kings (Dynasties 18–20)

Mythical and myth-related narratives written in Late Egyptian (Dynasties 19–20)

Key objects: Cleopatra's Needle (obelisk of Thutmose III), statue of Amenhotep III and Sobek-Ra, harpooner statuette of Tutankhamun, and Papyrus Chester Beatty I.

Third Intermediate Period, 1069–747 BC (Dynasties 21–25)

Egypt frequently divided

Kings of Libyan descent rule from the Delta (Dynasties 21–23)

Related dynasty of high priests at Karnak dominate the south (Dynasties 21–23)

Invasion by Nubian rulers

Key objects: Sacred eye amulets

Late Period, 747–332 BC (Dynasties 25–30, First and Second Persian Periods)

Egypt reunited under Nubian dynasty (Dynasty 25)
Nubians driven out by Assyrian invasion
Egyptian dynasty from Sais take control (Dynasty 26)
Demotic literature flourishes
Persians conquer Egypt
Egyptian leaders struggle for independence (Dynasties 27–30)
Persians reconquer Egypt
First surviving collections of local myths
Key objects: Shabaqo Stone, corn mummy, and Metternich Stela

Graeco-Roman Period, 332 BC–AD 395 (Macedonian and Ptolemaic Dynasties, Roman Period)

Persian Empire conquered by Alexander the Great. Founding of Alexandria
General Ptolemy takes control of Egypt during the break-up of Alexander's empire
Ptolemy family rules from Alexandria and rebuilds most major Egyptian temples
Myths inscribed on temple walls
Cleopatra VII and her son Caesarion (Ptolemy XV) defeated by Augustus. Egypt becomes part of Roman Empire (30 BC)
Hermetica composed
Egypt gradually becomes Christian
Development of Coptic language and literature

Byzantine (Coptic) Period, AD 395–640

Egypt becomes part of Byzantine Empire
Remaining pagan temples closed down
Knowledge of how to read hieroglyphs lost
Arabs invade Egypt

Arab Period, AD 640–present day

Glossary

Egyptian words are in italics.

akh: a transfigured dead person with semi-divine powers

ankh: the symbol of life

ba: a mobile manifestation of a dead person or deity shown as a human-headed bird

cippus (pl. cippi): a magical stela with an image of a divine child overcoming dangerous creatures

constellation: deities who form a fixed group in a particular context

cosmogony: a history of the origins and development of the universe

Delta: the north of Egypt where the Nile splits up before reaching the sea

duat: the underworld or inner sky; the realm of the dead

ennead: a group of nine deities who may be arranged into generations; a council of deities

hieroglyph: a Greek term meaning sacred carving, used for individual symbols in the pictorial script

Hermetica: texts produced in Graeco-Roman Period Egypt which purported to be the secret teachings of the god Hermes Trismegistus

inundation: the flood caused by the annual rise in water levels of the River Nile

isfet: the evil aspect of chaos

ithyphallic: shown with an erect penis, often of exaggerated size

ka: sustaining spirit of a person or deity

maat: truth, justice, balance, the divine order

nome: an administrative region or province of Egypt

nun: the primeval ocean; a state of watery chaos

ogdoad: a group of primeval deities, usually eight in number

papyrus: a paper made from papyrus stems or a book-scroll made from this paper

pharaoh: a term for an Egyptian king; literal meaning, 'great house' (the palace)

primeval mound: the first land to rise above the primeval waters at creation

scarab: image of a dung-beetle; symbol of Khepri, god of dawn

scribe: a person trained to read and write

shabti (***ushabti***): a magical figurine that acted as a substitute for a deceased person

solar bark: the boat of the sun god, also known as the Boat of Millions

stela: a flat slab with inscriptions and/or images, mainly as set up in tombs or temples

Underworld Books: illustrated texts recording the journeys of the sun god, chiefly found on the walls of royal tombs

uraeus: image of the cobra goddess who protects the king

vignette: an illustration to, or visual summary of, a funerary text

wedjat (***wadjet, udjat***): the restored eye of the god Horus; a symbol of regeneration and wholeness

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绪论

公元前 4 千纪后期，尼罗河谷和三角洲地区形成了两个王国：上埃及和下埃及。在之后 3,000 多年的时间里，埃及先后经历了 32 个王朝的统治（参见书末年表）。“法老”（意为“大房子”）是埃及国王的一个称号，因此埃及这段漫长的历史通常也被称为“法老时代”。

公元前 3 千纪到公元前 2 千纪的大部分时间里，埃及是古代近东最富有、最强大的国家。埃及人最早建造了巨石建筑，他们创作出精美的雕塑和彩色的浮雕，还发明了世界上最早、最美丽的书写形式之一——象形文字。即使埃及在公元前 1 千纪晚期丧失了政治独立，埃及的文化与宗教仍然保存了下来，并对希腊、罗马的文化与宗教产生了影响。

在埃及历史的大部分时间中，神话是埃及文化必不可少的组成部分。神话中的人物和事件广泛存在于埃及的艺术、建筑以及文学作品之中。神话对国王和祭司主持的许多宗教仪式起到了支持作用。受过教育的埃及人都相信，神话知识是在和今生与来世的种种危险作斗争并战胜这些危险的必要武器。

对于埃及最早产生神话叙事的时间，埃及学家们的观点并不一致，他们产生分歧的原因之一在于难以决定神话的定义。如今“神话”这个词通常用于表达负面的含义，形容某件事情

是夸张的或者不真实的。但在古代文化中，“神话”并没有这一层负面含义，人们认为神话就是一些故事，其中包含了诗一般的事实，而不是严格意义上的事实。一些学者认为神话描写诸神的故事，以此与其他类型的口头传说相区别。这个简单的定义对埃及神话来说可能非常合适，但它并不适用于所有文化。

一般来讲，神话都被置于一个人神共存的遥远时空中，意义丰富，影响巨大，可以用来解释或判断这个世界的运行方式。即使在现代，我们也承认神话具有自身的生命力，而且往往比它所基于的事实原型更具影响力。对于埃及人来说，神话具有超越个体经验的力量，可以作为连接人神世界的桥梁。

埃及神话从来不固化为一个标准的版本，它在3,000年的历史进程中不断变化和发展。每个地方性神庙的主神都有他们自己的神话，而即使是被描述成“核心神话”（参见第一章背景知识1）的基本事件，也不断地被重新讲述，并拥有许多不同的人物和背景。

本书按主题编排，每个主题都有一个特定的古埃及艺术品作为插图。选择这些艺术品是为了强调埃及学家在研究工作中所使用的原始资料的多样性，希望它们能够有助于我们理解这样一种与现代西方思想形式相距甚远的文化形式。笔者不敢假设可以把有关埃及神话的一切都讲得简单明了，况且也正是该领域的复杂性才使得从事这项研究具有无限的乐趣。

第一章

埃及神话：想象中的埃及

记载着埃及神话的原始资料并不都是布满尘土的纸草卷。在伦敦市中心泰晤士河的北岸矗立着一座方尖碑，名为“克里奥帕特拉尖塔”(Cleopatra’s Needle，图 1)。虽然这座石碑精美的基座以及两边的斯芬克斯像都是维多利亚时期修建的,但“尖塔”本身却是一座名副其实的古埃及方尖碑。“尖塔”这个绰号来源于阿拉伯语对方尖碑的称呼，它反映了人们的一种普遍观念，就是认为古埃及的一切都是规模巨大、超乎人的想象的。“克里奥帕特拉尖塔”有 20 多米(68 英尺)高，是埃及最大的几座神庙内的巨型方尖碑之一，它高贵、神秘，符合西方人眼中埃及建筑的形象。埃及人具有一种天赋，就是能够创造出具有视觉冲击力的象征物来表达复杂的观念，方尖碑就是一种表现神话世界的雕刻艺术。

一座方尖碑的历险记

“克里奥帕特拉尖塔”实际上是在图特摩斯三世（King Thutmose III）统治时期（约公元前 1479—前 1425）建造的，这位国王的生活时间比人们熟知的克里奥帕特拉女王 (Cleopatra，克里奥帕特拉七世）要早大约 1,400 年。图特摩斯的这个花岗

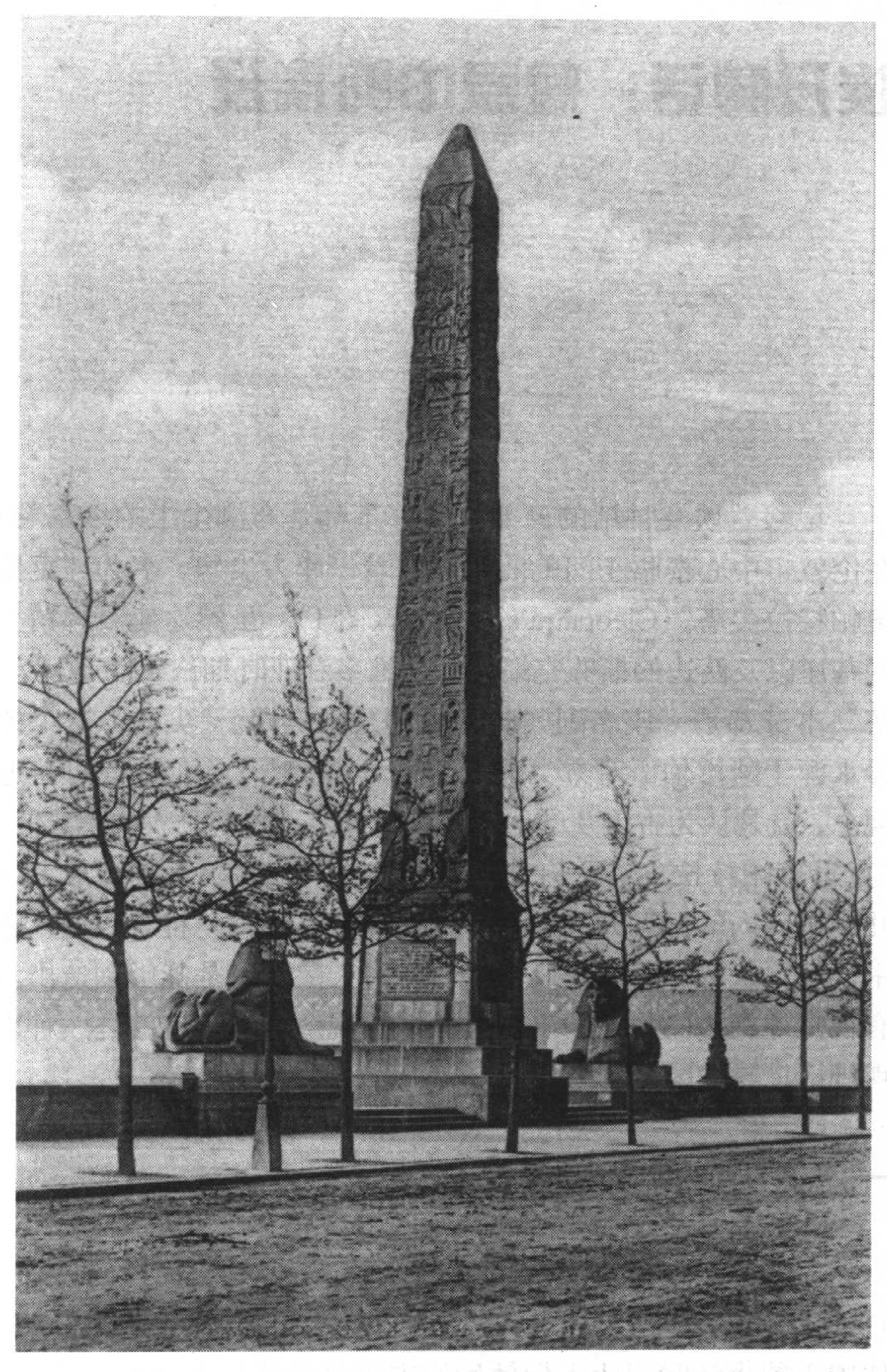


图 1. 位于泰晤士河畔的“克里奥帕特拉尖塔”（图特摩斯三世方尖碑）

岩方尖碑原本是一对方尖碑中的一个，它们在阿斯旺被开采出来之后沿着尼罗河溯流而下 400 英里，最后到达赫利奥波里斯（“太阳之城”），被竖立于太阳神拉神（Ra）的大神庙门前。太阳崇拜在埃及文化中至关重要，因此这座神庙是埃及最重要的神庙之一。赫利奥波里斯的祭司在古代以知识和智慧闻名于世，本书所探讨的许多神话都源于赫利奥波里斯。后来为了建造开罗城，拉神神庙遭到劫掠，如今在开罗现代化的城郊和飞机场的下面，仍然埋藏着少量神庙遗迹。“克里奥帕特拉尖塔”代表着一种悲伤的回忆，提醒着人们有多少埃及遗产已经丢失或被转移，而如今要想把这些分散于各地的文物拼合到一起又是多么困难。

通过在赫利奥波里斯建造这些方尖碑，图特摩斯三世执行了埃及国王的一项重要职责，就是为太阳神每日重生宇宙的循环提供便利条件。方尖碑的塔尖上覆盖着一种金银熔合的金属，被称为金银合金。这些方尖碑的位置都是经过了选择的，这样太阳每天早晨都会把它们照亮。这些方尖碑共同代表了复活之地——天边的高山。“克里奥帕特拉尖塔”是西方的地平线，是日落与死亡之地；这对方尖碑中的另一座代表东方的地平线，是黎明与重生之地。如同埃及的大多数象征物一样，方尖碑同时代表多个物体。单个的方尖碑还代表原初土丘，也就是在万物诞生的黎明太阳第一次升起之地。方尖碑是神话时代的标志，是神话中宇宙运行模式的组成部分，但方尖碑的这一重要作用却在随后的历史发展中渐渐失去了。

公元前 13 世纪，著名的统治者拉美西斯二世（Ramesses II）把自己的名字刻写在这两座方尖碑上，它们在当时可能已被运到尼罗河三角洲，立于拉美西斯二世在那里修建或扩建的一座神庙之中。到公元前 1 世纪，方尖碑立在了托勒密王朝的首都亚历山大里亚，克里奥帕特拉七世是这个王朝最后一位统治者。亚历山大里亚是希腊化世界的智慧汇聚地、科学与哲学的中心，而方尖碑的出现代表了更加难以参透的知识形式，这

些知识不能为实验所验证，也不能通过理性的争辩来取得。一篇碑铭记载说这两个方尖碑被克里奥帕特拉的敌人、罗马皇帝奥古斯都 (Augustus) 转移到别的地方，立在了一座祭拜尤利乌斯・恺撒 (Julius Caesar) 的神庙外。最终，亚历山大里亚频繁发生的地震使得位于西边的方尖碑轰然倒塌。

公元 1801 年，英国人在亚历山大里亚战役中打败了拿破仑 (Napoleon) 的军队，土耳其总督把这座方尖碑赠送给了英国。但"克里奥帕特拉尖塔"起初一直是一件无法运走的礼物，直到 1877 年，"克里奥帕特拉"号驳船将它运回英国，运输途中还有 6 个人为此丧命。方尖碑被成功地立于泰晤士河畔，这使得美国人羡慕不已，因此这对方尖碑中的另外一座于 1881 年被运到纽约，并竖立在中央公园。图特摩斯三世的方尖碑从此隔海相望，它们过去的作用和意义也从此不复存在，而这也是许多埃及方尖碑共同的命运，但在新的背景下，方尖碑又被赋予了新的意义。埃及的方尖碑最早是在奥古斯都统治时期被运往欧洲的，它们被用来陪衬不同的纪念建筑，包括奥古斯都的陵墓。这种做法激生了一种观念，即认为方尖碑主要用于纪念逝者，因此近几百年来，方尖碑多次被用于标记陵墓或纪念战争中的阵亡者。在人们的印象中，古埃及常常被认为是一个对死亡世界着迷的社会，但实际上埃及人的思想并非如此病态，方尖碑最早的功能其实是庆祝生命战胜了死亡。

秘密的智慧

方尖碑上通常都雕刻着埃及的书写符号，也就是象形文字。到公元 4 世纪末，认识这种象形文字符号的人已经所剩无几。大约就在这个时期，一位名叫赫拉波罗 (Horapollo) 的埃及人写文章向人们灌输了一种观念，就是象形文字的符号是一种秘密的符号语言，其中隐藏着伟大的宗教真理。实际

上早在公元1世纪，罗马作家老普林尼(Pliny the Elder)就已经声称埃及人把他们最秘密的知识刻写在了方尖碑上，他说这种知识的重要性甚至不亚于宇宙的性质和生命的意义。于是人们相信埃及人拥有这种秘密，而这也成为有关古代埃及的重要神话。

随着埃及在公元4世纪成为一个基督教国家，法老时代的那些“异教”文化被抛弃一边。《旧约》希伯来正典经书作出了埃及人的多神教不如犹太人的一神教的比较。早期的基督徒仍然相信异教神的存在，但却认为他们的地位很低，与魔鬼同级，一些讲述埃及神是如何暴虐纵欲的神话被用来支持这种观点。

穆斯林阿拉伯人在公元7世纪征服了埃及，他们对古埃及的宗教同样持敌视态度。然而对炼金术感兴趣的阿拉伯学者确实保留了一些被称为《赫尔墨斯集》的文本，它们创作于希腊罗马时代的埃及，主要用希腊文写成。这些文本据说是伟大圣贤赫尔墨斯·特利斯墨吉斯忒斯(Hermes Trismegistus)的秘密教义，赫尔墨斯这个人物部分源于埃及智慧之神图特(Thoth)。《赫尔墨斯集》把希腊哲学与埃及神话融为一体，赋予巫术和炼金术比喻意义，并向初学者许诺只要他们听从赫尔墨斯的教导，就把不死的秘密传授给他们。

文艺复兴和启蒙运动

在文艺复兴时期，古典著作被再发现，这一伟大发现使得一些有关埃及神话的知识也为人所知。从公元前6世纪开始，许多著名的希腊作家都带着崇拜之情描写埃及的宗教。哲学家柏拉图(Plato)认为是图特神发明了文字、数学以及天文学。柏拉图还在他的对话体作品《蒂迈欧篇》(约公元前348年)中说，阿特兰提斯(Atlantis)神话是由一名睿智的埃及祭司所作，他了解混沌初

开时的整个一系列毁灭事件。后来的古典传说声称大多数伟大哲学家都曾在赫利奥波里斯或其他埃及宗教中心学习过。

历史学家兼哲学家普鲁塔克(Plutarch)可能曾在公元1世纪到过埃及，他的著作《伊西丝与奥西里斯》重新讲述并诠释了有关这两位重要神祇的许多神话。类似的资料使人们习惯于借助希腊人或罗马人的视角去认识埃及，这对于埃及的神话研究来说是特别地不利。虽然希腊和埃及的神话学之间有一定的关联，但它们在范畴和功能上有很大的不同。

文艺复兴时期的学者们错误地认为《赫尔墨斯集》在时间上要远远早于毕达哥拉斯(Pythagoras)、柏拉图、亚里士多德(Aristotle)等哲学家的作品。人们认为《赫尔墨斯集》阐述了最古老、最自然的宗教形式。当时的人们对已成为国教的基督教会的腐败和残暴日益不满，其表现之一就是希望回到那个已逝的宗教思想的黄金年代。到公元17世纪，学界已经证明《赫尔墨斯集》事实上并没有当初想象的那么古老，但仍有许多人相信，在那些被带到西方的埃及文物上刻写的无法释读的象形文字中一定隐藏着远古的智慧。诸如蔷薇十字会和共济会之类的秘密社团组织都使用埃及的符号象征，由此给自己的信仰和实践伪造出历史悠久的印象。埃及的智慧还与激进分子和反权威组织联系在一起，例如法国大革命的领袖，他们以“再生之泉”取代了大家深恶痛绝的巴士底狱，喷泉顶端立有埃及女神的雕塑。此外还有美利坚的缔造者，不论是印在美钞上的国玺背面的金字塔图案还是华盛顿纪念碑——世界上最大的方尖碑，都反映了他们与埃及智慧之间的联系。

18世纪晚期，更多的外国人得以来到埃及，于是大量的埃及古物被带往欧洲。先期到达埃及的学者，比如那些跟随拿破仑来到埃及的学者，出版了关于埃及古代神庙和陵墓的插图本书籍。埃及的雕刻与绘画极大地影响了欧洲和美国的装饰艺术。争相破译埃及象形文字的工作成为19世纪早期最大的智力挑

战之一。福音派基督徒希望埃及铭文可以为《圣经》中记载的事件独立提供证明；而启蒙运动的支持者们则希望这些铭文可以展示一种与基督教对立的古代哲学。但结果令双方都不满意。

文字的破译与希望的破灭

刻写在方尖碑上的王名是最早被解读出的象形文字之一。许多国家的学者都为象形文字的成功破译作出了贡献，但其中最重要的人物则是才华横溢的法国语言学家让－弗朗索瓦·商博良（Jean-François Champollion），他为理解古埃及文字的语法及其书写字体打下了基础。在19世纪的后半叶，大量的埃及文本首次被翻译成欧洲的语言。

人们很快就发现，与《圣经》或者《古兰经》不同，古埃及宗教并非以一部圣书为中心，这种宗教有许多赞美诗和格式固定的祈祷辞，但却很少有欧洲人所认为的神学或哲学文本。大部分的神庙铭文被证实都与国王向神祇奉献例行的供品有关，其中并没发现有国家神话的集成，也很少有大段的神话叙述。留存下来的神话叙述主要都穿插在可使死者更容易地过渡到冥世的葬仪文本集或日常生活中所使用的魔法咒文之中。在这些原始资料里，反复出现的只有少数几个神话主题（参见背景知识1）。

背景知识 1

核心神话

造物主产生于努恩（*nun*，原初的海洋）之中
第一片土地（原初的小丘）从努恩中升起
太阳神出现／太阳之子诞生／第一次日出
太阳之子受到混沌势力的威胁，又被保护他的神祇们救出

造物主用体液／思想／语言／双手创造出生命
人类从愤怒的拉神之眼的眼泪中跃出
空气神分开了大地神和天空女神
埃及作为神界秩序的一部分被创造出来
伊斯菲特（*isfet*，混沌）和玛阿特（*maat*，秩序）之间的持续战争

造物主太阳神失去了他的眼睛／女儿／保卫者，但她最终被说服回归
神和人的叛乱使得太阳神毁灭了大多数人类，离开大地来到天国
埃及统治者奥西里斯（Osiris）被他的兄弟塞特（Seth）谋杀
奥西里斯的姊妹（伊西丝［Isis］和涅菲悌斯［Nephthys］）寻找他被肢解的身体
伊西丝使奥西里斯的身体复活并孕育了儿子荷鲁斯（Horus）
奥西里斯的身体被制成木乃伊，并被保护起来免遭塞特的攻击
神圣的母亲在沼泽地里生下荷鲁斯
小荷鲁斯被混沌生物下毒，后又被治愈
荷鲁斯和塞特为统治权而战
塞特的睾丸受了伤，荷鲁斯失去了他的一只眼／两只眼
荷鲁斯受伤的眼睛被另一位神复原，通常认为这位神是图特
荷鲁斯为他的父亲复仇；塞特被打败或被安抚
荷鲁斯成为人间之王；奥西里斯成为死者的审判官以及冥界的统治者

太阳神每晚进入冥界
神祇与幽灵保护太阳神的身体，使之免遭混沌怪兽阿波斐斯（Apophis）的攻击
太阳神联合奥西里斯使死者复活

太阳神出现在黎明以更新万物

造物主倦了，回到了原初的海洋
世界回归混沌

虽然学者们对于神话是什么样的故事这个问题争论不休，但他们通常都一致认为神话是故事。在埃及的艺术和文学中，像“女神诞生出非凡的婴儿”这样的个体神话事件经常独立出现。有许多不同的专业术语用于表达这些神话故事的要素或主题，例如：神话素（mythemes）、神话陈述（mythical statements）、元神话（monomyths）和基因文本（genotext）等。本书的大部分篇幅涉及的是神话素而非神话叙述（mythical narratives），因为埃及文化的所有研究者都会遇到神话素的问题。

由于埃及神话很难脱离自己的文化背景，因此19世纪热衷于发展一般神话理论的思想家们都对埃及神话没有太多兴趣。然而，那些认为神话可以解释宗教仪式和习俗的学派则对埃及神话感兴趣，但他们主要关注的只是神话的“最初”起源问题，他们并不关心神话在埃及文明的鼎盛时期到底起了什么样的作用。

神智学派、黄金曙光会等神秘宗教组织都积极地把埃及的神话和巫术加进他们的信仰杂烩之中，这可能也是学成于19世纪末20世纪初的许多埃及学家鄙视埃及宗教的一个原因。埃及宗教在当时被看作是不纯洁、不高尚的宗教信仰，在智慧上就逊一神教一筹，被巫术“毒瘤”所玷污。而备受古希腊人推崇的埃及祭司阶层此时也遭到指责，说他们主持无意义的宗教仪式并且干预政治。一些埃及神话由于其性爱内容而被认为是粗俗的，颇令人难堪。“克里奥帕特拉尖塔”上的铭文把敬献这座方尖碑的

国王与神拉－阿图姆 (Ra-Atum) 联系在一起，而拉－阿图姆据传是通过手淫后把精子放入自己嘴里的方式创造出了第一个生命。正是由于这个神话，方尖碑也可以使人联想到造物主勃起的阴茎，难怪西格蒙德·弗洛伊德 (Sigmund Freud) 要收集埃及的宗教艺术品!

权威埃及文语法书的作者阿兰·伽丁内尔爵士 (Sir Alan Gardiner) 指出，他所翻译的一些宗教文本"……在现代人看来是彻头彻尾的垃圾"。当他和他的同事们被指责"对法老时代的神话和宗教活动不感兴趣且傲慢无理"时，他回答说，这样做要好过只因为它们来自古埃及就"带着敬畏之情看待这些祭司文书"。

再后来，埃及学家们努力客观地看待埃及宗教。文化相对主义的理论以及宗教在许多人的生活中不再占有中心位置的现实情况推动了这种认识方法。在欧洲大陆，神话学仍然被正经八百地视为一把开启民智的钥匙，欧陆学者热衷于对定义和学术名词进行辩论，这种倾向使普通读者很难对他们的研究感兴趣。在英语世界里，专门研究宗教和神话的埃及学家目前并不多见，一个原因是目前英语世界的埃及学家们的研究重点是普通人的日常生活，"高雅文化"的艺术、建筑和文学一般被作为精英文化而受到冷遇。与研究方尖碑在宗教和神话上的重要性相比，人们更愿意研究方尖碑的建造方法以及它的建造者。

为何研究埃及神话？

考古科学使人们的目标由从历史中学习转向研究历史本身，考古发掘出的所有物品和文本现在被认为同等重要，虽然这并不是大多数有知识的人对待他们那个时代出土的物品和文本的方式。神话是古埃及最有创造力的人以及最深邃的思想家们留下来的遗产，本书相信这是埃及神话值得关注的原因，而

且本书认为这是理所当然的原因，因而不需作任何解释。古埃及是世界上第一个伟大的单一民族国家，古埃及文明也是世界历史上持续时间最长的文明之一，埃及神话清楚地说明了古埃及的核心社会准则。

神话帮助各个阶层的人探索他们的内心世界，消除危机并忍受生活中的矛盾。毫无疑问，埃及人在思考什么、期望什么、梦想什么，这与他们吃什么、穿什么相比，至少是同等重要的。神话是研究民族性的宝贵资料，仅举一个例子来说，诸神不得不在神界法庭上陈述各自的理由，这样的故事说明正义的概念在埃及社会是何等的重要。

在埃及文化的要素中，神话是对当代文明产生最大影响的元素之一。神话故事以及象征符号跨越了民族的界限，并被重新诠释以适应新的形势。有关伊西丝和奥西里斯的神话引起了一种国际性的宗教崇拜，它在罗马帝国时代是基督教的主要竞争对手。通过希腊、罗马的宣扬，埃及神话成为欧洲文化史与美国文化史的一部分，在不同的艺术作品中，如弥尔顿(Milton)的诗歌、莫扎特(Mozart)的歌剧以及托马斯·曼(Thomas Mann)的小说中都可以找到它的踪影。

到了21世纪，越来越多的人开始转向异教，在异教的历史中探求精神上的启示。对于这些探寻者来说，神话中的埃及成为了一幅风景画，上面有金字塔、方尖碑、斯芬克斯像、长有动物头的神祇、消失的陵墓以及复活的木乃伊。要想知道这究竟是怎样的一幅图画，我们必须回到埃及人的文字之中。

第二章

神词：语言与神话

我们有关埃及神话的知识只能像拼图一样拼凑起来，这些拼图碎片包括上百个不同时期的书面的和视觉的原始资料，这些资料都以不同的字体和语言来书写，这就使得事情更加复杂了。埃及学家们把埃及的语言发展分成 5 个主要阶段，而古埃及人共发明了 4 种不同的书写字体（参见背景知识 2）。迄今为止，最著名的埃及字体是圣书体象形文字，埃及人称其为 *mdw nṯrw* ——“神词”。“图像”(*twt*) 这个词语可被用作一个单个的象形文字，也可用来指一座神像，它们在古埃及都被认为是潜藏着生命的物体。

背景知识 2

古代埃及使用的语言和字体

公元前 4 千纪

口头和书面语言：古埃及语

使用的字体：原始圣书体象形文字；圣书体象形文字（从约公元前 3200 年开始）

公元前 3 千纪
口头和书面语言：古埃及语
使用的字体：圣书体象形文字、僧侣体

公元前 2 千纪
口头和书面语言：中埃及语、后埃及语（从约公元前 1400 年开始）
使用的字体：圣书体象形文字、草书体象形文字和僧侣体

公元前 1 千纪
口头语言：后埃及语、世俗语和希腊语
书面语：新中埃及语、后埃及语、世俗语和希腊语
使用的埃及字体：圣书体象形文字、僧侣体和世俗体

公元 1 千纪
口头语言：世俗语、希腊语、拉丁语；科普特语（5 种方言）；阿拉伯语（从公元 7 世纪开始）
书面语：新中埃及语、世俗语、科普特语和阿拉伯语
使用的埃及字体：圣书体象形文字、世俗体和科普特文

一座具有魔法的石碑

埃及人相信书面文字中蕴含着力量，这一点在 1828 年挖掘一口井时意外发现的一座保存完好的石碑（装饰有图像和碑文的石板）中可以得到证明（图 2a–2b）。这块石碑是齐普斯类型石碑[1]中最大的一块，“齐普斯”这个名字来自一个希腊词汇“盾”。埃及的统治者把这块石碑赠送给奥地利首相梅特涅（Metternich），于是梅特涅将之安放在梅特涅宫，因此这块石碑后来就被称为“梅特涅石碑”。1950 年，这块石碑被收藏于

[1] 一种魔法石碑，上面刻有神圣孩童战胜危险生物的图画。——译注，下同

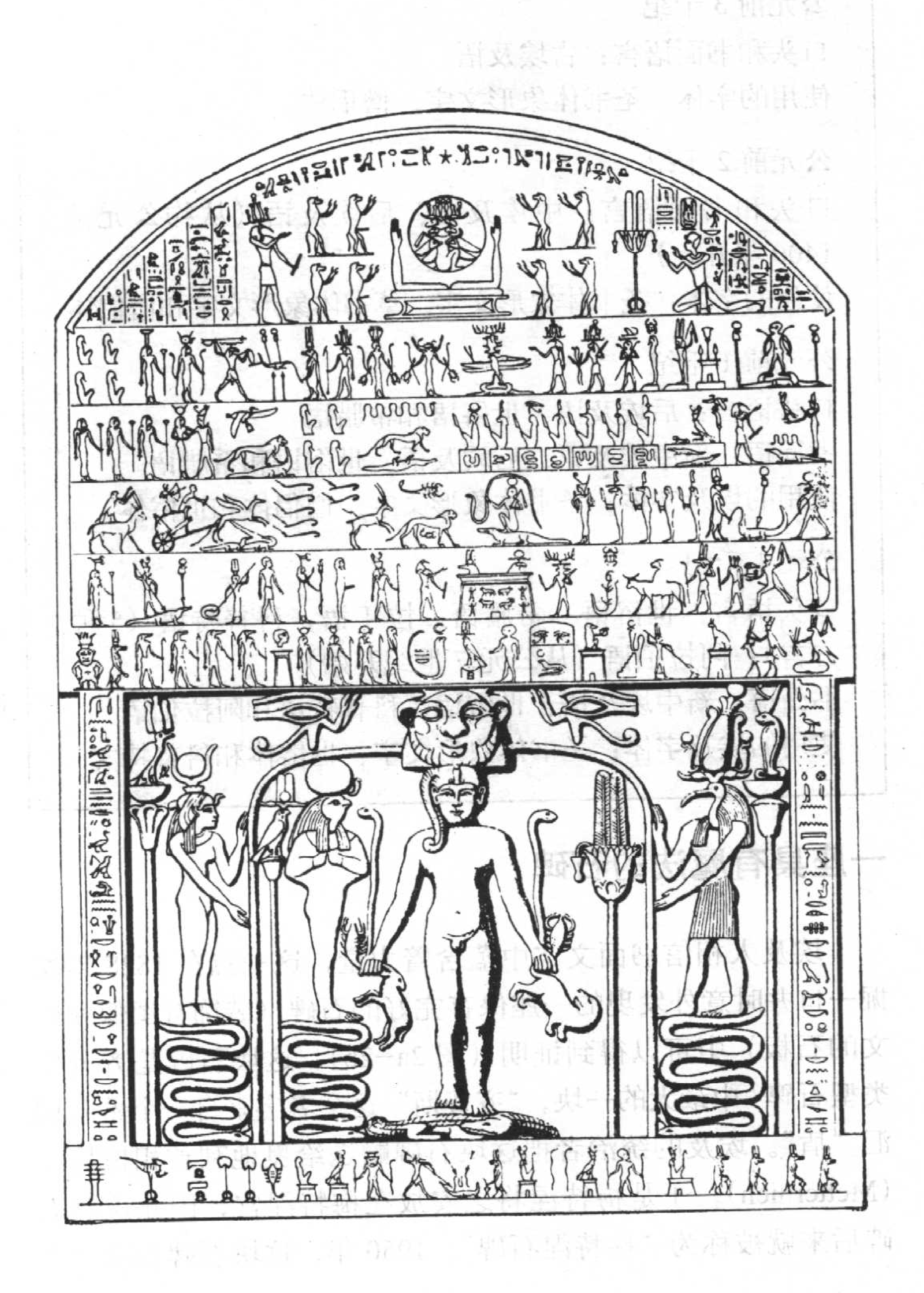


图 2a. “梅特涅石碑” 上部的图画

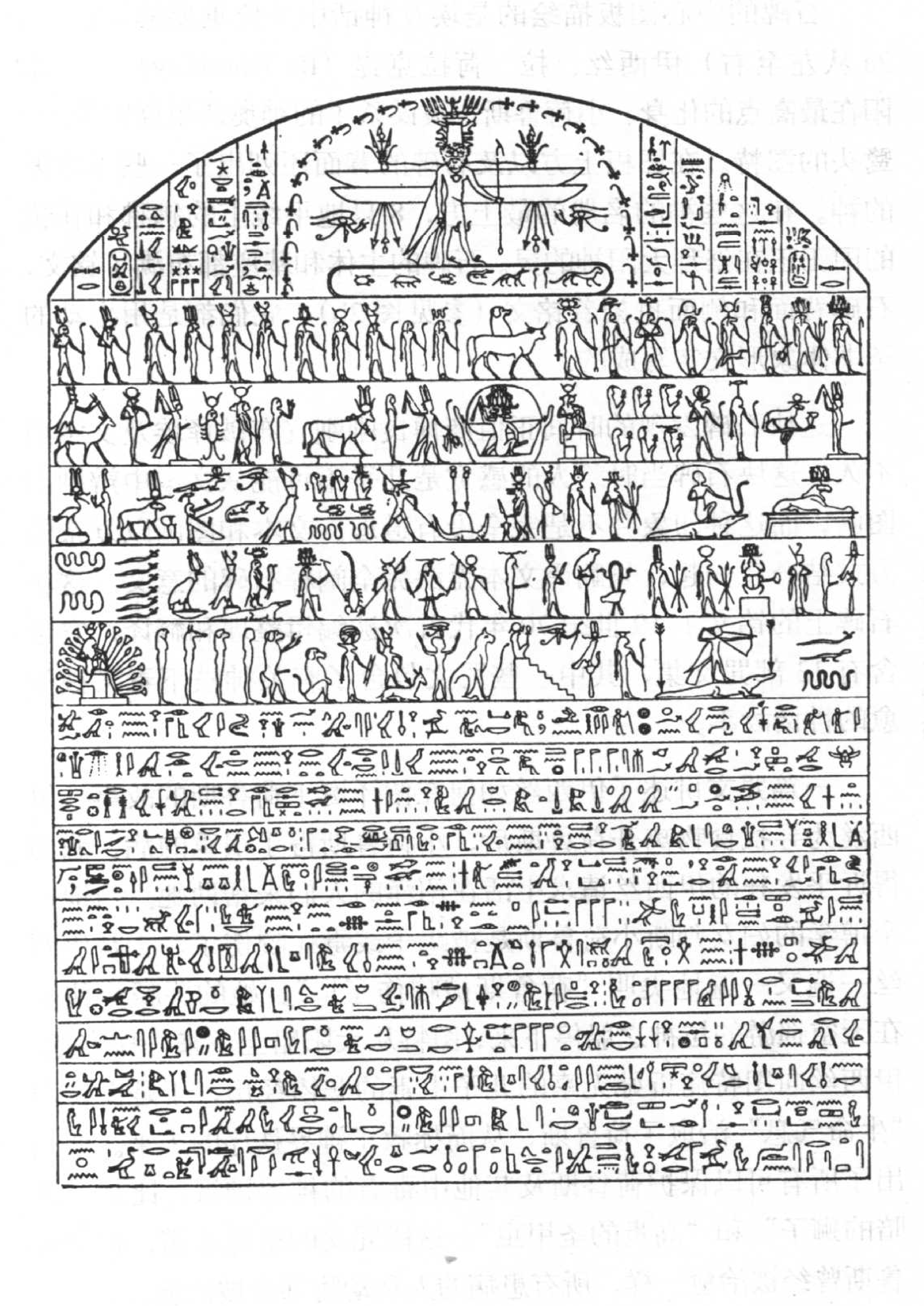


图 2b. “梅特涅石碑”上部背面

纽约大都会艺术博物馆。

石碑的中心图板描绘的是埃及神话中5位重要的神：（图2a从左至右）伊西丝、拉－荷拉克提（Ra-Horakhty）——太阳在最高点的化身、小荷鲁斯、被谋杀了的神奥西里斯的象征、鹭头的图特。在图板上方以及石碑的背面还列出了一些不常见的神。在这些神的名册的最上方，8只地平线上的狒狒和在位的国王正在祭拜太阳神的灵。石碑的主体和基座都布满了铭文，石碑背面和侧面也刻着铭文（参见图2b），它们都是用生动的圣书体象形文字写成的。

这块石碑发现的时间正值商博良刚刚宣布破译埃及文字后不久。这块石碑当时给人的感觉是几乎不可能从文本中辨别出图画，而这种印象并不是完全没有道理。文本和图画以复杂的方式结合在一起，只翻译文本无法完全阐释石碑的意义。这块石碑上的铭文于19世纪70年代首次被编辑整理和翻译，它包含有13部咒文集，其中一些咒文包含了有关神被下毒又被治愈的神话故事。

一篇咒文讲述了伊西丝如何在沼泽诞下荷鲁斯的故事。伊西丝为寻找食物离开荷鲁斯后，小荷鲁斯得了很重的病，悲伤得近乎发狂的伊西丝请求生活在沼泽的人们来帮助她。当地一个博学的妇女判断小荷鲁斯是被蝎子或毒蛇咬伤了，于是伊西丝一遍又一遍地尖叫“荷鲁斯被咬伤了！”。她的哭喊声使正在天空巡游的拉神之船停下来，图特从太阳船上下来一探究竟。伊西丝向图特痛诉她无辜的儿子中毒的悲惨经历，于是图特用“生命气息”治愈了荷鲁斯，从而拯救了神界秩序的未来。他列出了所有可以保护荷鲁斯及其他中毒者的神秘神祇，比如“黑暗的狮子”和“高贵的圣甲虫”。这段咒文的结尾承诺，就像荷鲁斯曾经被治愈一样，所有患病的人和动物都会被治愈。

把大篇的象形文字文本刻入坚硬的石头是一项技术要求

高且耗时长的工程，只有出现了重大原因人们才会进行这种工程。根据铭文记载，这个石碑是一位名叫尼萨图姆（Nesatum）的祭司让人建造的，以此表示对太阳神的化身穆涅维斯公牛（Mnevis bull）和涅克塔尼布二世国王（Nectanebo II，约公元前360—前343）的纪念。尼萨图姆声称石碑上的文本是古代魔法文，是他在赫利奥波里斯的神圣穆涅维斯公牛的墓地里发现的。对于这种说法我们通常应持怀疑态度，但从其中一些文本使用的语言来看，这些文本的创作时间比它们被复制在石碑上的时间要早大约1,000年。

尼萨图姆没有把这些有治疗作用的咒文藏匿在自己的私人图书馆中，而是将它们展示于神庙的外区。他的石碑既神秘又实用：一方面，“梅特涅石碑”上的咒文和图画展现了秩序与混沌之间永恒的战争，而这是埃及神话的中心内容；另一方面，这些咒文和图画为日常生活中诸如毒蛇和蝎子咬噬等危险提供了治疗的方法。石碑上的许多神都被表现成在踩踏、用矛刺或掐死蛇、鳄鱼及其他危险动物的形象。任何一个埃及人都能够认出，这些奇形怪状的人物都是传说中太阳神的保护者，他们被唤来赶走邪恶和苦痛。

蕴含着力量的文字

如同中世纪的大多数基督徒无法阅读他们教堂中的拉丁铭文一样，大多数的埃及人也都无法阅读“梅特涅石碑”上的象形文字铭文。即使神庙的书吏把石碑上的铭文大声念出来，来访者也很难理解这些铭文，因为它们用的都是古老的语言。部分咒文中的故事所使用的语言更接近于普通人的口头语，这些故事可能已在神庙的节庆活动中被吟诵甚至表演出来。

埃及人认为石碑的文字和图画中蕴含有内在的力量，人们可以通过触摸这些文字和图画来获取这种力量，因而一些齐普

斯石碑中心部位的图画几乎被一双双满怀渴望的手磨平。另一种获得力量的方法是向齐普斯石碑泼水，然后病人喝掉这些水或者用这些水洗浴，这样他们就能得到由这些水转化而来的生命能量。我们通常认为书面文字主要是要默默地、静静地阅读，但“梅特涅石碑”却提醒我们，在古代埃及，一切都是那样地不同。

神话常常被定义为“神圣的故事”，因此人们可能会设想神话一般都是用“神圣的”圣书体象形文字书写的，但实际情况却远非如此。埃及人认定这种文字蕴含着力量，因此他们在使用这种文字时非常谨慎。神话往往以神界的纠纷和斗争为主题，在描写一个邪恶的行为时，比如奥西里斯被他的兄弟塞特谋杀，将这种行为用象形文字描写就可能使它成为永久的现实，因此通常会避免对这种行为的直接描写或表现。

“梅特涅石碑”保留下来的故事的确讲述了荷鲁斯被毒害的过程，但这件事以皆大欢喜的圆满结局告终，即便是这样，象形文字文本中描绘神遭受痛苦的部分还得用几十幅表现神祇战胜混沌兽的正面形象的图画来平衡。涅克塔尼布国王 (King Nectanebo) 出现在石碑上，作为联系神祇和寻求治疗方法的人们的中间人。圣书体象形文字的一个主要作用就是使国王能够代表人类与神和祖先进行沟通，为了理解这一点，我们需要追溯埃及的书写历史。

书写与王权

象形文字既是交流的实用工具（参见背景知识 3），同时也是一个划分世界的体系。单个的象形文字分别是神、人、动物、植物以及构成世界的各个物体的图画。这种文字很可能发明于公元前 4 千纪晚期统治埃及大部分地区的南部国王们的宫

廷中，最早的象形文字出现在物账单上，用于记录税收、王室财产以及国王献给神庙的供品。到了公元前3千纪早期，更长的象形文字文本被刻在石制建筑、雕像以及石碑上。象形文字成为神庙和陵墓铭文以及王室向神祇或子孙发出布告的标准书写字体。男孩们在学校接受阅读和书写象形文字的训练，这些学校都附属于宫殿、王室墓地以及国家神庙。几乎所有受过这种教育的精英们长大后都会继续为政府工作，通常服务于诸如建造金字塔这种可以充分表现国王特殊地位的工程中。

到了旧王国时期（约公元前2686—前2181），埃及人发明了一种由纸草制成的书写纸张，并发展出一种简化了的字体用于书写信件以及政府公文，这就是僧侣体文字。在石头上刻写圣书体象形文字文本是一项集体工程，而在纸草上书写僧侣体文本则通常只需要一个书吏就可以完成。僧侣体后来发展成沿横行而不再沿竖列书写，从那之后，它就成为医药、巫术以及文学文本的主要书写字体（例子参见第七章图7）。“梅特涅石碑”上一些咒文的早期版本就是用僧侣体书写的。

旧王国时期并没有留下有关神祇的大段叙述，但是关于他们的传说却口口相传地流传了下来。公元前2400年到公元前2200年王室金字塔中的咒文集细致地描绘了大量的神的形象。这些《金字塔铭文》经常暗指一些神话事件，比如造物主阿图姆（Atum）吐出或打喷嚏喷出第一对神：舒（Shu）和泰富努特（Tefnut）。咒文集包括5大类咒文，其中一类就是“梅特涅石碑”上发现的抗击毒蛇的咒文。《金字塔铭文》并非是用来解释神的世界或者人神关系的铭文，它们的主要功能是帮助安葬在刻写有铭文的金字塔中的国王或王后实现转世，方法之一就是通过宗教仪式把已故的王室成员与神界中的人物或事件等同起来。

背景知识 3

象形文字介绍

象形文字并不是幼稚的图画文字，而是一个由几种不同类型的符号构成的成熟灵活的体系。单个的象形文字(符号)有时可用作一个表意符号来代表一个词汇,因此“牛”(ka) 这个词就可以用一头牛后再加一笔竖杠 𓃒𓏺 来表示。象形文字也可以表音，表示 1 到 4 个发音，“猫头鹰” 𓅓 写作“m”，“鳄鱼皮” 𓆎 写作“km”。25 个符号每个都代表一个辅音或者一个半元音，它们通常被称作“象形文字字母”，但这种字母从不独立使用。

以表音符号拼写的词语通常都以一个阐明词义或范畴的非表音符号结尾，例如，象形文字“眼睛”就被放在视觉或失明等词的结尾。这样的符号被称为限定词或类符。当象形文字“眼睛” 𓁹 被置于词头时，这就是在书写埃及文“眼睛”*irt* 中的音 *ir*。词尾的 *t* 表明 *irt* 是一个阴性名词，因此当造物主的眼睛被拟人化之后，它变成了一位女神而不是一位男神。文字的游戏也能够生出神话，由于“人们”这个词的发音类似于“眼泪”这个词，因此据说人类是从眼睛女神的眼泪中诞生出来的。

语言的书写方式可以为神祇在神话中的角色提供证据。表示塞特神的怪兽 𓃩 被用作“混乱”一词的限定词。所有女神的名字都用眼镜蛇作为限定词。“太阳圆盘”的象形文字 𓇳𓏺 拼作 ra，这是埃及文中表示太阳以及太阳神的名字的词语，但作为限定词，它与和时间有关的词语连用。神的名字通常后面都跟着一个神的坐像 𓀭，而这种情况在书写拉神时却很少出现，由此表明这个神与太阳光

之间的联系是多么紧密。拉神在神界是一位非常重要的神，因此在短语或头衔中，他的名字即使从语法上讲应该放在末尾，在实际书写中也可以写在最前面。然而，在象形文字文本被翻译成英文之后，这种内在的细微含义就都丧失了。

虽然国王们宣称自己拥有神一般的地位，但旧王国的统治还是随着中央集权的衰落和瓦解而结束了。一些埃及学家认为，神话中秩序与混沌交战的主题来源于旧王国的瓦解给人们带来的震撼。

黄金时代

延续了一个世纪之久的分裂状态最终由一位来自上埃及底比斯城的国王结束，随后而来的中王国时期（约公元前 2055—前 1650）被普遍认为是埃及文学的黄金时代。大量用中埃及语创作的散文和诗歌留存下来。中埃及语作为一种文学语言被持续使用了约 2,000 年，这也就是像尼萨图姆这样的祭司能够阅读和理解古代文本的原因，受过教育的埃及人并没有因为语言上的障碍而切断他们与其历史之间的联系。

在中王国时期，贵族墓葬的棺木上面可以刻写内容丰富的咒文，它们能够在冥界帮助死者（例子参见第五章图 5），这些咒文统称为《石棺铭文》。它们甚至比《金字塔铭文》包含更多对于神话事件的隐喻，其中一些咒文由神祇的演说组成，讲述他们曾做过的事或曾经遭受过的痛苦。在许多文化中，最古老的神话叙述都采用的是第一人称，这个形式由口头传说自然转化而来。《石棺铭文》中还包含有神与神之间的对话，这使得看待埃及的神话事件的视角多种多样。

对话体还特别出现在“教谕文学”或称“智慧书”的文学类型中，这些作品的内容都是一个权威人士(神、国王或父亲)教导一名少年如何按照玛阿特(秩序、真理、公正)的准则生活。这些作品中有一些是相当写实的，它们甚至承认那些与父辈没有共同信仰基础的年轻一代很可能会把这些教导抛诸脑后。这些作品通常被归为伦理文本而非宗教文本，但它们满篇都提到了神话的内容。

中王国时期只有少量故事保存下来，其中包括有关塞特试图引诱他的侄子荷鲁斯的神话的片断。这些古老的故事无法拥有像“教谕文学”那样高的地位,但它们绝不是简单粗陋的。《船舶遇难者的故事》(约公元前 1900 年) 是一个战胜灾难的传说故事，用于鼓舞一位被国王冷落的官员。这个故事的梗概是一位水手被海水冲到一个偏僻的小岛上，之后被一条神秘的蛇所救，它改写了《石棺铭文》中有关世界末日的神话，然而令人意想不到的是，听故事的官员并没有振作起来，他拒绝接受正义终将战胜邪恶、神助善者的世界观。到中王国时期，埃及的作家们显示出的是一种疏远神话的态度，他们创造性地使用神话来表达对人在社会中的作用的看法。

《韦斯特卡尔纸草》(约公元前 1700 年) 中保存下来的全套故事可能更接近于民间的口头传说，但它的结构很复杂。故事发生在建造大金字塔的国王胡夫 (King Khufu，基奥普斯)的宫廷中，为了取悦国王，他的儿子们给他讲述了为胡夫王室祖先服务的伟大的巫师的故事，其中一位王子讲得最好，他讲述了一个名叫杰特 (Djedi) 的农民的故事，说他的巫术比以往任何一位巫师都厉害。当这位虽已 110 岁却还精力充沛的巫师来到宫廷之后，他与胡夫就巫术的正当使用问题展开了意志的较量。杰特预言将有 3 位非凡的婴儿诞生。然后这个故事的场景转到了一位祭司的家里，祭司的妻子鲁德杰特 (Ruddjedet) 正在艰

难分娩。太阳神拉似乎才是孩子们真正的父亲，他让一群神装扮成跳舞的少女和她们的挑夫来帮助鲁德杰特。在三胞胎出生之后，这些神祇留下3顶王冠隐藏在房子里。

早期的听众可能已经知道鲁德杰特的孩子们注定将成为接替胡夫王朝的国王。埃及悠久的历史使得埃及人可以把幻想故事发生的时代背景置于遥远的过去，为了起到教育的作用，他们也不需要用奉承的语言描绘历史上的国王。在《韦斯特卡尔纸草》时代,王室的权威又经历了一次衰落。在第二中间期（约公元前1650—前1550)，外来统治者希克索斯人控制了三角洲。最终，底比斯王朝赶走了希克索斯人，埃及再次统一。

新王国时期的革新

在新王国时期（约公元前1550—前1069)，埃及吞并努比亚和近东的一个帝国，在文化上也达到了顶峰。以“克里奥帕特拉尖塔”的奉献者、国王图特摩斯三世为代表的统治者花费了帝国所聚敛的巨大财富来修建大型神庙建筑。帝王谷中新王国时期王室的陵墓规模虽然不大，但装饰华丽，生活在戴尔美迪纳村的一群工匠和书吏专门负责这项工作。现在被称为《阴间地府书》的文本原本保存在神庙的图书馆中，当时都被复制刻到王室陵墓的墙壁上。《阴间地府书》的中心主题是拉神之旅，人们认为太阳神在夜晚会进入一个危险的领地，在那里神界秩序的敌人试图阻止太阳神在黎明时到达东方地平线重生万物。在大多数《阴间地府书》中，一系列附带说明的图画取代了文字的叙述。

新王国时期的殡仪咒文集现在被称为《埃及亡灵书》(以下简称《亡灵书》)，其中的图画也占有非常重要的地位。许多拥有《亡灵书》的人无法阅读象形文字，但他们能够理解那些概括咒文内容的复杂小图画所代表的含义。到新王国末期，一

些贵族的墓葬中出现了“神话纸草”,这种带有插图的神话叙述，例如天地分离，在过去很少出现。

在公元前 14 世纪前后，一种新的书面语言形式进入到非正式的文书写作中。后埃及语更接近于当时的人的说话方式，它反映了埃及已成为一个民族成分更加多样化的社会。只有少量用后埃及语记载的故事流传了下来，但它们都非常有趣。其中一些故事保存在戴尔美迪纳工匠村的复制本中，这种情况说明文学为新兴的“中间阶层”所喜爱。一段有关荷鲁斯与塞特较量的生动叙述将在第七章中再作详细分析。后埃及语故事《注定厄运的王子》和《两兄弟的故事》被认为是世界上最早的童话故事，因为它们包含了诸如公主被囚禁在高塔上或巫师把他的心脏藏在树里等主题，而这些内容在之后的各文化的民间传说中都能见到。《两兄弟的故事》属于一个独特的埃及文学类型，其中的神话事件似乎由人或半人的人物再次表现。

动乱的时代

随着埃及的国家权力被北部利比亚后裔的国王们和南部底比斯祭司集团瓜分，新王国时代结束。在公元前 1 千纪，埃及经历了内战以及一系列外族入侵（参见书末年表）。努比亚王朝的统治被亚述人的野蛮入侵推翻。公元前 7 世纪，亚述人又被来自舍易斯的一个埃及王朝赶走。大约在这段时期，一种叫做世俗体的新的书写字体被引入日常生活中，“世俗”一词本为希腊文（意为“普通的”），用在这里指埃及语言的一个阶段。大量使用世俗体书写的文学作品发展起来，其中的一些反映了希腊的影响，有许多故事集和史诗那引人无限遐想的残片保存了下来。

公元前 5 世纪，波斯人征服了埃及，但埃及的领导者在希腊雇佣军的帮助下予以还击。拥有埃及血统的国王一度恢复了

统治，“梅特涅石碑”的建造时间就是在这些国王中的最后一位——涅克塔尼布二世的统治时期。在混乱的年代，埃及人往往会追溯他们辉煌的过去。尼萨图姆就强调他的咒文集年代非常久远，因而具有权威和力量，这些咒文创造出一种对于过去状态的描述：玛阿特总是胜利者。尼萨图姆的石碑传达出一个讯息：受过教育的精英阶层仍然掌权，他们可以使来到神庙的人获得古代的智慧。

“梅特涅石碑”建造完成仅几年之后，波斯人再次入侵埃及，涅克塔尼布二世溃逃，许多神庙被劫掠。后来埃及成为亚历山大大帝（Alexander the Great，公元前356—前323）短命帝国的一部分，随后亚历山大的马其顿将领之一托勒密·拉古斯（Ptolemy Lagus）在亚历山大里亚建立王朝，统治埃及将近300年。在托勒密时期，希腊语成为官方语言，但埃及的文化仍然活跃在各个神庙之中，托勒密王室还主持了大规模的神庙重建工程。在公元前30年埃及成为罗马帝国的一部分后，这项工程还持续了大约一个世纪。

最后的岁月

公元前400年到公元100年对于埃及神话的原始资料来说是非常重要的一段时期。一些神话和传说被扩展成内容纷繁复杂的文学叙述，地方性神话配上插图被记录在纸草卷上，几个神话故事或戏剧用象形文字刻写在神庙的墙壁上。埃及文化受到外族人的威胁，埃及人对此感到恐惧，这刺激并推动了他们对本国神话的整理和保存。许多外国人也确实对埃及宗教感兴趣，但他们读不懂刻写在神庙墙壁上的文字，也读不懂保存在神庙图书馆内的书籍。因此，像普鲁塔克这样的作家不得不依赖他本人或更早的古典作家从讲希腊语的埃及人那里听来的故事。

在大约公元 1 世纪，一种混合有希腊字母以及几个世俗体符号的书写字体得到了发展，一部分《赫尔墨斯集》和一些魔法文本就用这种科普特语书写，但大多数现存的科普特语写成的文学作品还是基督教文本。到公元 4 世纪，基督教在埃及成为占统治地位的宗教，虽然像“梅特涅石碑”上的铭文一样的咒文仍在使用，但其中的主角伊西丝和小荷鲁斯已被替换成马利亚 (Mary) 和耶稣 (Jesus)。现代西方有关神性的认识都是由像基督教这样的一神教塑造的，而在下一章中，我们将看到埃及人是如何看待他们的神的。

第三章

对于神本身的认识：神与神话

人们所认识的古埃及的神多是他们的艺术形象，而非神话故事中的形象。卢克索博物馆所展示的艺术精品之中有一尊方解石材质的雕像，表现的是鳄鱼神苏美努王索贝克－拉(Sobek-Ra, Lord of Sumenu) 拥搂着国王阿蒙霍泰普三世 (King Amenhotep III，约公元前 1391—前 1353)（图 3)。这尊 7 吨重的雕像是 1967 年在达哈姆沙（古代苏美努）一个密封的深坑中发现的，这个深坑在历史上可能是神庙饲养神圣的鳄鱼的池子。大多数来博物馆参观的游客都会惊叹这尊雕像在雕刻技术上的完美娴熟，但雕像的主题却使许多人对埃及艺术感到费解。埃及国王的统治在今天看来就是向神谄媚奉承，政治上也很幼稚。现代的参观者和许多古希腊人、罗马人一样，通常认为兽头人身的神的形象荒诞不经甚至令人心生厌恶。古典时期的艺术也有神和兽，但在埃及，兽似乎就是神。

人们持这种态度的部分原因是由于对埃及艺术的误解。如同许多现代抽象艺术一样，埃及艺术也是要抓住事物的本质并用一个实实在在的形式表现复杂观念。阿蒙霍泰普三世并没有被真实地表现出来，而是被塑造成一个埃及人所需要的神一般的年轻人和理想化的统治者形象，这就意味着在一个世纪之后，拉美西斯二世能够把这尊雕像变成他自己的雕像，他只需要把雕像上阿蒙霍泰普的名字替换成他自己的名字即可。

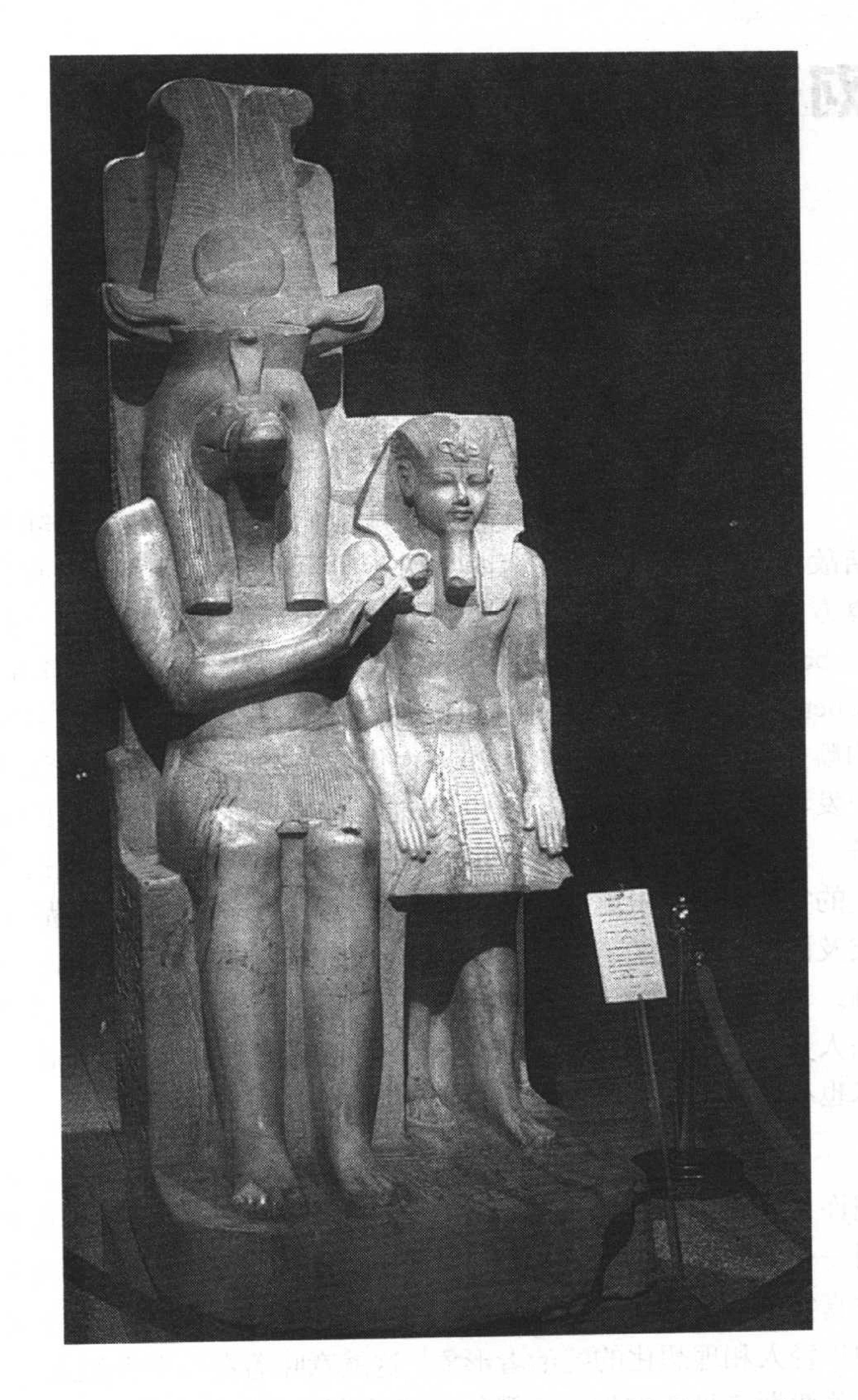


图 3. 卢克索博物馆的索贝克－拉与阿蒙霍泰普三世雕像

索贝克－拉神是鳄鱼神与太阳神两位神祇的结合体。这个二元神被描绘成半兽的形象以表现他奇异而令人敬畏的神力，尤其是他具有鳄鱼的力量、诡诈和长寿以及制服母亲河——尼罗河的能力。他头饰上的太阳圆盘表现出拉神——赐予生命的日光之神化身成索贝克的形象来表现自己。他的半人形象使他可以与国王互动，从而使他得到生命的象征——“安可”[1]（ankh)。这尊雕像旨在展现，或通过这一展现形式引出：代表人的国王与代表神的索贝克－拉之间的理想友爱关系。

神话中描写的这些神具有怎样的天性？他们与犹太－基督教或者伊斯兰教观念中的神有哪些差异？这些疑问或许可以通过对一系列问题的解答得到答案。

神生活在何处？

埃及的神是生活在超越时空范畴的不可及的神界，还是生活在人类的世界？这个问题可以有多种多样的回答。一些宗教文本把造物主阿蒙神说成是存在于宇宙界限之外的一种不可见、不可知的力量。另一些文本却强调说造物主的精髓存在于宇宙的构成要素以及他所创造的所有生物体之中。

对于神居于何处这个问题，一个答案可能是“居于过去”。在一位名叫布特哈蒙（Butehamun）的书吏写给他已故妻子的信中，他说拉神和他的“九神团”（Ennead)，或顾问团像旧日的国王一样都已离开。大多数现存的神话叙事都被置于一个遥远的时代当中，那时统治埃及的是一个神

[1] 古埃及生命的象征，为钥匙造型，只有神和国王才能以手持“安可”的形象出现。

的王朝。这个黄金时代随着第一拨背叛和谋杀活动而终结(参见背景知识1)，神逐渐退回到大地以外的地下神界之中，在那里他们以其神秘的真实形态生活，体形巨大、散发着光芒，而且带有强烈的香甜气息。大多数人只有在死后才能进入神界，但神仍然以各种不同的方式与人间交流。

神可以通过自然现象来展现自己，比如风暴、洪水和瘟疫，他们的灵魂也可以“附体”在国王、侏儒等特殊的或不平凡的人身上，也可以出现在神圣的动物、树木以及物体上。埃及艺术的一个主要功能就是以雕像、绘画或象形文字的形式给神提供暂时的本体，在埃及神庙里举行的许多宗教仪式都以促使神在这些物体上栖居为目的，这样他们的存在可以惠及人类。因此像索贝克这样的神被认为可以同时生活在创世之前的原初海洋中、天边群山中的宫殿里、埃及湖泊和沼泽中的荒芜地带以及神庙里的雕像和神圣的鳄鱼身上。

古埃及有多少位神?

对于这个问题，研究埃及宗教的专家们给出了不同答案，从“一个”到“上千个”不等。埃及宗教被普遍认为是多神教的一种成熟形式。从一开始它就有许多不同性别的神，人们按照自己的意愿向那些与自身生活关系最为密切的神祇形式祈祷祭拜，举个例子来说，如果你依靠尼罗河为生，那么你祈祷的核心神可能就会是鳄鱼神。

在埃及历史上，大约有80位神祇拥有多处以自身的名义修建的圣坛和神庙。一些神很少成为大家顶礼膜拜的对象，比如天空女神努特(Nut)，但他们在神话中的地位却非常突出。如果我们把宗教信仰和神话两方面的证据放在一起，那么大约有30位神可以称为埃及的主神(参见背景知识4)。

埃及语中的 *ntr*（神或能力）一词被用来称呼这些主神，同时也用于指许多不那么重要的生物，比如星辰神、拟人化的观念、神化的国王、冥界的居住者以及“梅特涅石碑”之类的东西上显示的各种古怪的保护神。如果所有这类生物都被包含在埃及的众神谱中，那么我们叫得上名字的神就会有上百个。而如果每个像“苏美努王索贝克－拉”这样在特定地点祭拜的神祇形式都分别算作一个神的话，那么埃及就将有几千个神。因此，可以说埃及神话有一大群潜在人物。

一些埃及学家称，埃及宗教从一开始就向着一种一神教的形式发展。埃及的说教文中就用“神”这个词的单数形式来指代统治宇宙的力量，创世神话表明埃及人相信有一个原初的生物创造了无数的神、人和动物。从新王国时期起，一些文本把埃及的所有神都仅仅看作是这个原初造物主的灵魂或表现形式。宗教异端国王埃赫那吞（King Akhenaten，约公元前 1352—前 1336）曾尝试废除太阳神阿吞（Aten）以外的所有神，结果没有成功。他的继任者们认为在整个创世的循环过程中，造物主总是以无数男神和女神的形式出现。

这些神中的每一个神都可以分裂成为一对神或是一组神，或者与另一个神结合。一些埃及文本称赞索贝克－拉神为造物主；而另一些文本，例如被伽丁内尔摒弃为“十足的垃圾”的赞美诗，则罗列出了索贝克存在于埃及不同地方的多个表现形式。索贝克和拉可以结合成为太阳－鳄鱼－造物主，就像我们前面所展示的雕像一样，但他们分开来也可以行使各自的职责。在埃及人的思想中，神的形象不是固定不变的，这可能与叙事性神话的发展方向相反。

背景知识 4

神话与宗教信仰中的主要神祇

阿蒙／阿蒙－拉：造物主，在底比斯被尊奉为众神之王

阿努比斯：豺神，木乃伊制作术的发明者，陵墓的守护神

阿图姆／阿图姆－拉：赫利奥波里斯的造物主，太阳神在晚上的表现形式

巴斯梯特（Bastet）：猫女神，拉神的守护者，丰产之神

盖伯（Geb）：大地之神，努特的丈夫，神界法庭的领袖

哈托尔（Hathor）：母牛女神，掌管出生、死亡以及宇宙的再生

荷鲁斯：天上的猎鹰，塞特的对手，埃及统治者的原型

伊西丝：奥西里斯的遗孀，荷鲁斯的母亲，魔法女神

凯普利（Khepri）：圣甲虫神，掌管黎明和再生

克努姆（Khnum）：公羊神，造物主，尼罗河水的控制者

孔苏（Khonsu）：造物主，月亮神，命运的掌控者

玛阿特：拉神的女儿，真理和正义女神

米恩（Min）／阿蒙－米恩：男性之神，掌管农业丰收

穆特（Mut）：复仇女神，在底比斯被尊奉为阿蒙－拉的妻子、孔苏的母亲

奈特（Neith）：造物女神，太阳神的保护者

涅赫伯特（Nekhbet）：秃鹰女神，南方的保护神

涅菲悌斯：伊西丝的姊妹，被强迫做塞特的妻子

努恩：原初海洋之神

努特：天空女神，奥西里斯、伊西丝、塞特、涅菲悌斯的母亲

赫尔摩波里斯的“八神团”（Ogdoad）：八位原初神，包括阿蒙和努恩

奥西里斯：冥界的统治者，庄稼丰产之神

普塔（Ptah）：孟斐斯的造物主，艺术家和工匠的保护神

拉：造物主，太阳神，宇宙的统治者
塞克美特（Sekhmet）：凶猛的狮子女神，太阳神
塞特：奥西里斯的敌人，荷鲁斯的对手，最强大的神
舒：空气和日光之神，分开了天与地
索贝克：原初的鳄鱼神，尼罗河之王
索卡尔（Sokar）：孟斐斯的死亡和再生之神
泰富努特：舒的姊妹，盖伯和努特的母亲
图特：月亮神，掌管智慧、语言和书写，表现为鹭和狒狒的形象
瓦吉特（Wadjyt）：眼镜蛇女神，北方的保护神

女神不如男神强大吗？

同时供奉男神与女神是古代宗教的一般模式，甚至在犹太教中似乎也存在过一位女神，她是耶和华（Yahweh，希伯来语中的“神”）的妻子，但后来从文本记录中被删除。把神分成两个性别是真实世界的反映。在当时的现实世界里，埃及的女性无法拥有男性享有的所有特权；但在神话中，女神的力量却似乎并不亚于男神。大多数埃及创世神话都把造物主说成是一位男性，但也有一些神话描绘了最初的女性造物主的形象，比如奈特女神——“世间万物的母亲和父亲”。从理论上讲，所有神都应该服从于神王太阳神拉，但到了新王国时期，拉神有了一个女性对手——赖耶特（Raiyet）女神。

在一些神话中，拉神似乎要依靠他残忍的女儿，也就是眼睛女神的力量。拉－阿图姆派他的一只眼睛在黑暗的原初海洋中寻找他丢失的孩子——舒和泰富努特时创造出了眼睛女神。但是当女神归来的时候，她发现拉神已经长出了另外一只眼睛，

女神为此而落泪，人类就从这些眼泪中诞生出来。

人们通常都是根据与男神的关系来认识一位女神的，当他们被当成一对神祇来崇拜的时候，女神的名字一般都跟在男神的后面，这一现象与人世间的夫妻是一样的。然而，如果女神扮演的是母亲的角色，那么其子女的地位就要低于她，母亲角色对于女神的重要性要高于父亲角色对于大多数男神的重要性。埃及神话中几乎完全没有浪漫的爱情故事，但母爱却一直被描绘成宇宙中最强大的力量之一。

宗教艺术的限制使得女神看起来处于被动的地位，这是对女神地位的误解。在艺术作品中，伊西丝就是一个哀悼奥西里斯或者谦恭地站在他宝座后面的妻子形象，或是满脸甜蜜地哺育她的宝贝的母亲形象。但在神话中，她是一个强势人物，为了给丈夫报仇而战斗，为了把她的儿子推上埃及王位而不断谋划。在艺术作品中，女神似乎比大多数男神拥有更多的表现形式。她们变换外形的能力在神话中也得到了赞扬，在一段神话故事中，伊西丝就从上年纪的丑陋老妪变成了年轻姑娘，又变成了捕猎的猛禽(参见第七章背景知识9)。

眼睛女神既掌管生命也掌管死亡的双重身份可以通过她外形的突然变化表现出来。当拉神让他的眼睛去毁灭犯有叛乱之罪的人类的时候，她被变成了一头暴怒的狮子塞克美特，她吞下所有邪恶的人并在拉神的哄骗下放过了其余的人。她的整个狮子形象在神话中得到生动描述，但很少在艺术作品上有所体现。一般来讲，女神比男神要更可怕，在埃及的众神中可没有温顺的主妇形象。

埃及众神是否组成了家庭？

大多数古埃及人都不像今天的我们一样认为自己是独特的个体，他们更愿意把自己归属为某个家庭或某个等级组织的一

员，并且要尊敬长者。埃及的神常常集体行动，当被赋予国王般权威的最高神拉神出现时，其他神通常都表现得像一群服从的朝臣一般。

血亲关系在埃及非常松散，因此当一位男神或女神被称为拉神的儿子或女儿时，他（她）也许只是他的后裔或者年龄较小的亲戚。埃及神祇中最有名的一组神是赫利奥波里斯的“九神团”，“九神团”将奥西里斯和荷鲁斯融合到拉－阿图姆神的谱系中，从而把宗教思想中的主要元素结合在了一起。这个家族谱系的4代，有时说是5代，跨越了从创世到王权建立的整个历史(参见背景知识5)。神也可能被组成像核心家庭一样的家庭组织，通常是父亲、母亲和孩子的三口之家。但我们不能把这些家庭关系太当真，因为这些关系很少有太多的连贯性。除了个别例子以外，埃及的神都不是有着固定生活经历的固定人物，最著名的一对夫妻神是奥西里斯和伊西丝，但奥西里斯有时又可能是他两个姊妹的丈夫，而伊西丝也可能成为她儿子荷鲁斯的性伴侣。

背景知识5

赫利奥波里斯的“九神团”

阿图姆／拉－阿图姆

舒－泰富努特

盖伯－努特

奥西里斯 伊西丝 塞特 涅菲悌斯

荷鲁斯

“九神团”的另一种组合形式是用奥西里斯和塞特的兄弟大荷鲁斯(Horus the Elder)取代伊西丝的儿子荷鲁斯。

大多数的神都扮演某个特定的人物角色，比如父亲、配偶或儿子，从而与其他许多神建立起联系。在神话中，索贝克通常都是造物女神奈特的儿子。在索贝克的一个崇拜中心，他被认为与蛇女神拉尼努特 (Renenutet) 是一对夫妻，而小荷鲁斯则成了他们的儿子。但在另一个崇拜中心，索贝克又被认为是女神哈托尔的丈夫，这个三口之家的孩子则是月亮神孔苏。后一种认识可能与尼罗河有关，因为人们认为哈托尔可以控制尼罗河水的泛滥以及沿河上溯所必需的北风。而当索贝克和拉神结合为一体时，他与哈托尔的关系就更复杂了，在神话中，哈托尔可以有拉神之母、拉神之妻和拉神之女这三重身份，她是太阳神永远的阴性补充体。

这些神都是什么神?

对于那些研究多神教体系的学者们来说，他们已经习惯于认为神祇是某种自然现象的或是负责某一领域的男神或女神，例如宙斯 (Zeus) 被认为是天空之神，阿芙洛狄忒 (Aphrodite) 是爱神。这种划分对于我们来说很有用处(参见背景知识 4)，但却未必符合最初的那些祭拜者看待神的方式。在埃及人看来，神首先是权力的拥有者，人们可以为任何事情祈求所有的神，但其中也确实存在着某种程度的细化分工。神的类型可以通过他们的名字、称号、外貌以及在神话中所扮演的角色表现出来。

用地点作称号是最普遍的做法，比如苏美努之王索贝克。一些神，不论男神还是女神，其实就是某个城市、区域或某种地方风物的主神。一些较小的神，例如创造性思想之神西阿 (Sia)，仅仅是概念的人格化形式，而且这些概念在其他文化中一直都是抽象的。神界秩序的人格化形式玛阿特女神同样也是这样产生的，但她在神话中发展成为一个更丰满的人物，成了太阳神最宠爱的女儿。其他神与自然界的要素相关联，但关联形式并不简单。拉神战胜了死亡，把光和能量赐予万物，太阳

只是拉神的光辉那看得见的表现形式。神话赋予拉神另一个形象——易犯错误的统治者，为人类的叛乱以及众神的密谋而悲伤。一些神还与人类生活的某些特殊技能和领域相关，比如图特与书写有关、伊西丝与哀悼和治病有关、哈托尔与爱情有关，这些关联也能够产生神话。

重要的神通常都有几个有趣的地方，有些甚至与其他神的有趣之处相交叠。索贝克的特征很少为他所独有，但这些特征组合在一起就构成了一个独一无二的神的形象：他鳄鱼的外形与其他某些神相同，比如塞特和肯梯凯特(Khenty-khet)；他像塞特一样可被视为最强大的神；像米恩一样在所有神中性能力最强，可以满足许多女神；像哈匹(Hapy)一样是洪水(尼罗河每年的泛滥)之神，人们称赞他使沙漠“变绿”；索贝克还是法尤姆地区的保护神，因为那里有一个满是鳄鱼的湖泊；他也是那些在水上或水边劳作的人们的保护神，比如渔夫、捕鸟者、洗衣工等等；同时他也是使人猝死的命运之神的残暴工具；他还是表现原初海洋的生物之一；而如果他戴上“太阳圆盘”的帽子，那么他就是创造和延续了万物的神祇。

埃及的神是全能而不朽的吗？

在赞美诗和祈祷文中，埃及的神由于他们的智慧、力量和能力而为人们所赞美，但在其他文献中，他们的能力似乎是有限的。神也要遵守“玛阿特”的规定，他们或许会服从于命运的安排，并不总能预见未来。埃及神话把神描绘得比人类更加长寿、更强壮、更有能力，但他们也会变老、也可能受到伤害。在故事《拉神的秘密名字》中，太阳神就遭遇了年老带给他的侮辱，同时还被他过去用来创造世界的力量之一“海卡”(heka，魔法）所伤害。那个世界就像混沌海洋中的一个小岛，混沌状态的各种势力构成了对神的不断威胁。

埃及的神在与混沌怪兽的战斗或者在神与神互相之间的斗争中也会受伤甚至死亡，但这种死亡似乎只相当于暂时的休眠，伊西丝在被斩首后复活，塞特多次被残忍地处死，但他总能再次苏醒。在这些例子中，死去的通常都只是神的某个身体或表现形式，但奥西里斯的死亡似乎是永久性的，他无法再回到他在埃及的前生之中。一些《阴间地府书》指出，太阳神在每天晚上死去，然后又在每个早晨获得重生。时间就是由出生、生活、死亡以及复活这个无法回避的循环构成的。造物主最终将感到厌倦而回归混沌，直到创造一个新世界的时刻的到来。

埃及的神都是善良的吗？

在大多数神庙铭文中，神似乎都是亲切而慷慨的，他们主动对人们的祈祷以及奉献给他们的供品作出回应，降福给国王和所有人。但那些保护人们不受这些神伤害的魔法文却说，并非所有的神都是甜美快活的。一些神的形象，比如七重形象的狮子女神塞克美特就非常可怕，但拉神的女儿塞克美特并不是一个邪恶的女神，她带来的瘟疫和战争通常都被看成是神所裁定的正当惩罚。

“善良的神”是奥西里斯特有的一个称号，这说明善良这个特征并不是每个神本身就具有的品质。最初这个称号可能是在提及一个令人恐惧的死神时所用的一种避讳方式，如同希腊人常常把可怕的复仇女神说成是“和善之神”一样。在一个用世俗体文字写成的故事集中，奥西里斯派两个魔鬼去挑起埃及的内战，这个计划被一位祭司兼巫师发现了，但他被阿努比斯残忍地杀害。

人们认定的伦理标准似乎并不适用于神，其中的部分原因在于把宇宙力量的相互作用变成了叙述故事，而且故事中的人

物角色都与人类近似。神话中的神也具备人类的缺点，比如嫉妒、贪欲和坏脾气。地与天变成了一对多情的夫妻(盖伯和努特)，在创世之前不得不用武力使他们分开。人类的种种动机有可能被掺杂在神话故事中，因此塞特有时被说成是出于性方面的嫉妒而攻击他的兄弟。

塞特犯了许多错误，但他的力量是拉神所需要的，他那不当的贪欲也能够带来有益的结果，例如月亮神的诞生。在《拉神的秘密名字》中，伊西丝用一条带魔法的毒蛇使拉神中毒，而她给拉神解毒的条件是要他真实名字中所具有的力量。但这个邪恶的行为似乎又是正当的，因为她这样做的目的是要使她的儿子荷鲁斯成为所有国王的表率。

在一些原始资料中，甚至造物主太阳神都是可怕的，他要定期吃掉所有其他生物。图中的雕像就描绘了这个循环的两个极端：索贝克－拉作为原初的神吞下了整个世界，而阿蒙霍泰普三世作为太阳神之子又复原了这个世界。然而，大多数的赞美诗、祈祷文和说教文都对造物主大唱赞歌，认为他是智慧、仁慈的神。我们在下一章中将探讨创世神话。

第四章

美丽的时刻：创世神话

大英博物馆馆藏的“夏巴卡石碑”上的铭文在 1901 年被首次翻译出来，从那时起，埃及学家和神学家们就对它产生了浓厚的兴趣。这块石碑以国王夏巴卡（King Shabaqo）的名字命名，是他于公元前 8 世纪命人建造的（图 4），后来人们在孟斐斯普塔神庙废墟上的村庄里发现了它。这块玄武岩石碑在很长时间内都被用作石磨的下扇磨盘，因此它上面所刻的象形文字铭文有些已经被磨掉了，而具有讽刺意味的是，这块石碑本来是用于保存一卷已遭虫蛀的古代纸草卷上的内容。

这卷纸草文本现在被称为《孟斐斯神学》，它是埃及神话两个重要领域的主要史料来源：宇宙起源（创世故事）和奥西里斯神话。原始文本中的一部分在被复制到石碑上之前似乎就已散佚，而其他部分又由于石碑的磨损而被破坏。这说明埃及神话的原始资料能够保存下来是多么具有偶然性，因此我们千万不能认为已经对埃及神话有了完整的认识，在任何时候都可能有一个新的发现完全颠覆我们过去的观点。

图 4. 大英博物馆中的“夏巴卡石碑”

《孟斐斯神学》

《孟斐斯神学》包含不止一个创世神话，神话版本的多样性使得本来很有价值的埃及创世故事鲜为人知。《孟斐斯神学》的起源最早可以追溯到公元前3千纪早期，因为它所使用的语言看起来比《金字塔铭文》的语言更为古老。《孟斐斯神学》的发现曾令那些致力于探求一神教起源的学者们激动不已，因为它似乎提供了一个早期的例证来证明有一位超越宇宙的神用他智慧的力量创造了世界，但在证实了整个故事写于公元前8世纪并且不是真实的历史之后，神学家们对这个文本彻底丧失了兴趣。现在大多数的埃及学家相信《孟斐斯神学》中的创世叙述实际上大约创作于公元前13世纪，这个时期人们对于创世的神祇特别感兴趣。"夏巴卡石碑"的刻写者们或许用了一种非常古老的字体重新书写了《孟斐斯神学》，因为这样可以使之更具权威性。

夏巴卡是一位努比亚国王，使用武力将埃及重新统一于他的统治之下。夏巴卡王朝尤其崇拜阿蒙－拉，以他为造物主太阳神，他们崇拜并进一步装饰了卡纳克的阿蒙神庙和赫利奥波里斯的拉神神庙。夏巴卡利用这块石碑巧妙地尊崇了普塔神及其祭司们的主张，同时推广了一篇调和孟斐斯神话与赫利奥波里斯神话的文本。这块石碑是公元前8世纪起宗教与文化开始变得敏感的一个明显的例证。

那么《孟斐斯神学》究竟讲了些什么？要把这部深奥的文本翻译出来并不是一件容易的事。石碑上的铭文是诗歌和散文的混合体，用第三人称叙述，所说的话语都被刻在神像的口内。它可以分成4部分。第一部分描写了国王夏巴卡如何复原古代文本，并以普塔－塔－泰纳(Ptah-Ta-Tenen)作为上下埃及的统一者兼国王的形式为夏巴卡创造出一个神圣的榜样。第二部分

的内容与现存的一部中王国时期的手稿近似，这是一部为王室宗教仪式而创作的手稿，它把王权的历史追溯到一场关于谁该继承被杀害的奥西里斯神、成为埃及统治者的大辩论中。盖伯以及神界法庭最初的决定是让塞特做“他的出生地”上埃及的统治者，荷鲁斯成为“他父亲被溺死之地”下埃及的统治者。而他们后来的决定是让荷鲁斯成为唯一的国王，从而使这个国家统一。

然后这个文本又陷入了典型的埃及范式，回溯荷鲁斯的父亲奥西里斯之死。但这个故事并不是呈直线地平铺直叙下来，我们看到的是穿插了起因和结果的一系列事件。这些重大事件都发生于孟斐斯城及其周围，因此最终获胜的荷鲁斯被认定为孟斐斯神普塔－塔－泰纳。铭文的第三部分描述了普塔神创造世界的过程，第四部分暗示了普塔神与复活的奥西里斯之间神秘的结合。其中有关宇宙起源的部分值得我们更详细地探讨。

“第一时间”

《孟斐斯神学》把普塔和代表原初世界要素的所有神都联系在一起。这些“产生于普塔之中”的神包括普塔－努恩(Ptah-Nun)和普塔－纳乌奈特(Ptah-Naunet)，他们分别代表原初海洋里黑暗的混沌之水的阳性和阴性两个层面。在这片海洋内部潜藏着有智力的生命体，但直到造物主的灵魂拥有意识的时刻，这种潜力才被开发出来。神的名单已经被毁损，但名单之后的内容很可能是把普塔与“升起的土地”塔－泰纳(Ta-Tenen)联系在一起，因为在《孟斐斯神学》的其他部分中，普塔就等同于“万物从中产生”的神塔－泰纳。第一片土丘得以从原初海洋中升起，这是埃及人称之为“第一时间”的重大事件之一。这片土丘为造物主的诞生提供了场所。

背景知识 6

有关创世的想象

“第一时间”的地点和物质：

原初海洋

原初沼泽／芦苇丛

原初土丘

原初莲花

宇宙之卵

陶工旋盘

柳树

原初生物：

青蛙和蛇（“八神团”）

蛇（阿蒙－卡玛泰夫 [Amun-Kematef]、阿图姆、奈特）

黑牛（阿蒙、普塔）

巴努鸟（*benu*）/ 不死鸟（阿图姆、拉、奥西里斯）

猎鹰（大荷鲁斯）

鹅——“伟大的讲话者”（阿蒙）

鹭（图特）

鳄鱼（索贝克－拉、蓬文悌 [Penwenti]）

母牛（迈海特－维列特 [Mehet-Weret]、哈托尔、奈特）

太阳之子（拉、涅菲泰姆 [Nefertem]）

月亮之子（孔苏、图特）

拉神之眼（哈托尔、泰富努特、巴斯梯特、塞克美特及其他神）

阿图姆的手（哈托尔、尼布底泰派特 [Nebethetepet]、尤萨阿斯 [Iusaas]）

种子女神（哈托尔）

海赫诸神——天空的支撑者

在赫利奥波里斯，原初土丘与神圣的“奔奔石”相关联，在神庙建筑中“奔奔石”以“克里奥帕特拉尖塔”等方尖碑作为代表。另一个原初事件是由众神名单中列在最后的神——“拉神鼻子上的”涅菲泰姆引起的。涅菲泰姆是原初莲花（或睡莲）之神。据说这朵香气扑鼻的蓝色莲花从原初海洋中冉冉升起，花瓣张开,内现一个金孩,这就是“美丽的时刻”,是第一次日出，造物主以小太阳神的形象出现。

在其他地方的创世神话中，地方神特有的形象被用于表达不可知的生命起源（参见背景知识6）。创世的第一项活动可能是一只闪闪发光的鸟儿要在原初海洋的中央寻找栖息之地，也可能是一只被称为“伟大的讲话者”的鹅正在下蛋，而太阳即将从这枚卵中诞生出来。埃及的宇宙起源说通常包括几个明显自相矛盾的原始事件，埃及人似乎也没有把他们的创世神话当真，其实，这些神话更像是源于自然界的充满感情色彩的隐喻说法。

创世行动

现在造物主准备开始创造世界的活动了，那么创造的方法是什么样的呢？对于这个问题，《孟斐斯神学》再次给出了多个答案。埃及人在设想生命的发端时，使用了他们在日常生活中见到的各种创造模式：繁衍出人类和动物的性行为、生出庄稼的播种行为、人的思维能力和双手创造出物品的能力。普塔是手工业者和工匠们的保护神，但创世故事在一开始就把他与“用精子和手指”造物的赫利奥波里斯的阿图姆联系在了一起。

《金字塔铭文》和《石棺铭文》中的段落描写了阿图姆在原初的海洋中如何变得孤独寂寞。他既是父亲也是母亲：他使自己的阴茎勃起，然后把他的“精子”放进嘴里，随后吐出第一对神：舒和泰富努特。一些版本暗示阿图姆在性行为过程中

所感受到的快感是创世过程中至关重要的一部分。这似乎是一个令人震惊的原始神话，而且它还被详细绘制在纸草上，放入高等级男女祭司的墓中。造物主拥有阴阳同体的特征，这一点有时可以通过把阿图姆的手人格化说得更清楚：他的手变成了一位女神，她与阿图姆的阴茎结合创造出了生命。

《孟斐斯神学》运用以口为中心的关联词语重新叙述了这个神话。阿图姆把他的口作为孕育生命的子宫，而他的口的一些部分也可以代表神之语言的力量。埃及人相信控制身体的智慧隐藏在心脏里，在《孟斐斯神学》中，据说普塔是在他的心里设计出神祇、人类和动物，然后用他的舌头为他们命名，从而最终将他们创造出来。在其他原始资料中，造物主的这些能力被人格化为洞察力／创造性思维的神（西阿）和发布命令性／权威性言辞的神（胡）。普塔的“神词”如同象形文字一样，可以使想法变成现实。正是这种更具智慧的创世方法使得人们把《孟斐斯神学》与《约翰福音》著名的开篇之语——“太初有道，道与神同在，道就是神”相比较。

《孟斐斯神学》并没有否认赫利奥波里斯创世神话的真实性，而是用另一种说法取代了它，就是说阿图姆是普塔的心脏和舌头。希腊罗马时期的一篇创世文本赋予普塔与他在赫尔摩波里斯的宇宙起源说中相似的地位，该起源说以神秘的原初生命为中心，总称为“八神团”。普塔用3种方式创造了“八神团”：思索（智慧的）、造卵（手工艺的）以及把他的精子洒在原初沼泽中（性方面的）。然后他使“八神团”联合，将他们转化成一个神：造物主阿蒙神。

《孟斐斯神学》没有特别强调人类是如何被创造出来的，这也许是因为有关人类起源的神话的标准版本与拉神密切相关。一个版本说人类起源于太阳神之子在与他母亲分离时落下的眼泪，而神起源于他们母子团聚时他发出的笑声。在美索不

达米亚神话中，人类就是被当作短命苦力而被创造出来的，替地球上的小神祇们做工。在埃及神话里，人类的创造似乎更具偶然性，但为神服务也是人类的一项任务。

《孟斐斯神学》强调普塔创造了道德秩序与社会秩序，其中包括宗教的概念，因为宗教将为人们所奉行。这主要是指人类对于神的生命力“卡”（*ka*）将要附体的雕像的崇拜。普塔还创造出了各种手工艺，比如雕刻技术，人们可以使用这些技术来模仿普塔的创造能力。作为造物主和统治者，普塔一直是控制万物的智慧，就如同从外面无法看到的体内的心脏一样。在荷鲁斯和图特神统治埃及的时代，他们都要具体表现出普塔的洞察力和支配力。

被创造出来的世界存在着缺瑕这一点并没有被否认，《孟斐斯神学》简短的第四部分回到了奥西里斯溺水而亡的悲剧中，但却显示了这个悲剧是如何转化成了某种积极的东西。荷鲁斯确保他的父亲得以进入一个神秘的世界，在那里死亡之神与生命之神可以合为一体，复合神普塔－索克尔－奥西里斯(Ptah-Sokar-Osiris)负责复活那些被埋葬在孟斐斯坟墓中的死者。而在生者的世界里，造物主的力量通过荷鲁斯传给在孟斐斯统治埃及的历代神和国王们。

创世的神话与神庙

有关《孟斐斯神学》的性质问题，从事这个文本的早期版本研究及翻译的两位德国学者有不同的意见。一位学者认为这是一部带有释义的神话戏剧的剧本，但已被严重篡改；另一位则认为它是一篇连贯的神学论述文章，然而他也承认其中包含的演说可能源自于曾在神庙上演的改编成了戏剧的神话。创世神话是哲学思考的一种形式，但比起它不那么抽象的动机来说，这一点倒是没那么重要。

从某个角度来说，《孟斐斯神学》可以被视为一个典型的具有法律效力的神话。它赋予王权、祭司制度等神圣的起源，因而使它们的长期存在具有了合法性。当公元前8世纪民族认同受到了来自外部的武力威胁的时候，这种神话就变得格外重要了。给受过教育的精英阶层公开表演创世神话具有承认普塔神庙及其祭司拥有至关重要的地位的作用。愤世嫉俗者可能会把《孟斐斯神学》看作一篇宣传文章，旨在说服政府不要资助那些构成竞争威胁的神庙，而这也许确实是该文本的目的之一，但单单从这一个角度来认识这个文本则会忽视埃及神话所起的改造作用。

《孟斐斯神学》不论是被大声朗读出来还是刻写在石头上，都被认为具有改造现实的能力。创世叙述可以促进世界按照神意进行改造，《约翰福音》中有关创世的部分是许多基督徒圣诞节时都会在教堂朗诵的篇章之一。世界的被创造与救世主的诞生被表现成并行的事件。在埃及的宗教仪式上，创世故事常常与造物主太阳神或其代表——国王战胜混沌势力的故事一同被讲述。创世神话能够被从容地刻在石头上，就是因为它们全都是正面的叙述，是庆祝神界秩序“玛阿特”建立的故事。

如同在其他许多古代文化中一样，创世神话与宗教神庙的建筑风格和功能紧密相关。一些早期埃及神庙的主要特征就是一堆沙子，这极有可能就代表着最早的创世行为的发生地——原初土丘。后来的神庙把土丘或方尖碑包含在内，或者抬高了神像所在的圣坛的地面，使其高于建筑物其他部分的地面。神庙文本并没有把这些特征视为带有某种象征意义的改建，而是将之作为创世的实际发生地。对于虔诚的信徒来说，既然同一个上帝可以以面包和酒的形式出现在几千个不同教堂的圣餐礼中，那么大多数重要的神庙都认为自己是创世的发生之地的现象也就不再让人困扰了。从某种意义上讲，所有的圣坛都是指同一个地点。

其他的创世之神

一个神庙的主神通常都等同于造物主，这意味着地方的男神和女神获得了造物主的地位。为了确立这个地位，就要在神庙的节庆活动中背诵或表演创世神话。在埃德富的荷鲁斯神庙中，创世随着对原初沼泽以及栖息在芦苇上的一只神圣的猎鹰的征服而开始。在卡纳克的孔苏神庙，孔苏被表现成长着公羊头的蛇的形象，是它，孵化出宇宙之卵。

在有两位主神的神庙里，这两位神都可能拥有自己的创世神话。在埃斯纳，公羊神克努姆和女神奈特各自的创造能力都在赞美诗中得到颂扬。克努姆用他的性能力创造生命，他释放尼罗河的洪水使庄稼生长，还用陶工旋盘制造出动物和人的躯体。人们认为创造活动在过去与现在都在一直进行着，因为新生命在不断产生。在一个人出生前，克努姆或奈特要造出他的身体，然后用“生命气息”赋予他生命。

如同《孟斐斯神学》中的普塔一样，据说奈特也使用神词来进行创造活动。在关于她的神话的一些版本中，只需使用7个有力量的词语就可以把世界创造出来。奈特掌管婴儿的出生，她在她母牛形态的身体中孕育出太阳神，她的身体等同于原初海洋创造生命的力量。神身上的所有东西都可以变成生命体，奈特的唾液和呕吐物变成了混沌兽阿波斐斯，他是太阳神的死敌。奈特还把太阳之子从原初海洋的混沌之水中托出，从而拯救了他。作为造物主，奈特似乎是一个中立力量，既创造秩序生物也创造混沌生物，但在“第一时间”末期，她最终选择了秩序一方。

太阳神常常被视为造物主在世界上的积极力量。在神庙的宗教仪式和《阴间地府书》中，每一次日落都被看作是世界的末日。太阳神在夜间的旅行把他带入黑暗的混沌世界，然后神

话中的人物，比如神秘的“八神团”以及创造性思想和权威性言论的神祇们，在神话中的黎明时刻帮助太阳神再次升起使万物重生。明天并不只是另外的一天，还是另一个世界。对于埃及人来说，他们的国家就是那个世界的中心。下一章我们将考察物质世界对于埃及神话的影响。

第五章

黑土地、红土地：神话的地理环境

大英博物馆中有一套雪松木棺椁，棺木上面的装饰画是几幅人类历史上最古老的地图（图 5）。这套棺椁的主人是一位名叫古阿 (Gua) 的医生，他生活在公元前 19 世纪，死后被葬在赫尔摩波里斯附近的艾尔－贝尔沙。据称这些地图所展现的是“度阿特”(*duat*)——太阳神以及已故者必须旅行经过的冥界。冥界中横贯着一条大河，还有毒蛇出没的沙漠、火之湖以及神秘的岛屿。这些地图是被称作《双路书》的《石棺铭文》片断的一个组成部分，其中一条穿越冥界的路是水路（用蓝色标记），另一条是陆路（用黑色标记）。

与地图相配的文本描绘了看守火焰门或扼守河流转弯处的恶魔，因此古阿带着咒文，以使他能够躲过这些令人恐惧的守卫，在其中的一篇咒文里，他声称自己是被召唤去看护受伤的奥西里斯的医生：“噢，火焰呀！为我开出一条路吧，使我可以顺利通过！我要照顾奥西里斯恢复健康。”这些地图为死者指出了安息的地点，比如“献祭之地”和“奥西里斯和图特之所”。古阿的最终目标是登上造物主太阳神的船，沿着大地和天空的“蜿蜒水路”航行。像古阿棺木之类的物品上之所以有神话般的地形图，这是由埃及独特的地理条件决定的。

图 5. 古阿医生的外棺底部

原始地貌

现代埃及大概90%的土地都是沙漠，但在公元前5000年之前，尼罗河谷一直都是一片大沼泽，高地部分是一片广袤的大草原，其间散布着季节性的湖泊。那时的古埃及人都是猎人或者牧人，过着半游牧生活。露出地面的岩石和形状类似后来的金字塔的圆锥形山丘都是陆地的标志，是人们聚居的地方。古代的岩石画表明这片草地上生活着大量不同种类的野生动物，其中许多动物，如狮子、秃鹰、豺和瞪羚等，都与埃及的神联系在一起。

然而，这种富足的生活没能持续下去，气候上的重大变化使草地日渐干涸，缺乏经常性的降水迫使人们不得不去寻找永久的水源。于是一些人定居在了尼罗河谷的边缘地带，并冒险深入到鳄鱼、眼镜蛇、河马以及野牛活动频繁的沼泽地区。在公元前4千纪，大多数人都迁入了河谷，沼泽地区的水被排出，土地得到清理，开始大面积种植谷物。到了古典时代，人们用神话来解释这种变化，说奥西里斯在人间游历，教会人们农业种植的技艺。

生命之河

尼罗河这个名称是希腊人给起的，对于埃及人来说，它就是“河”，是他们所知道的唯一一条河。每年，来自埃塞俄比亚群山上的融雪和雨水使青尼罗河和白尼罗河的水位增高，两条河汇聚成一条充满泥沙的洪流，淹没了尼罗河谷及其三角洲地区的所有低地，时间长达几个月。在三角洲地区，一些沙丘还可以一直保持不被全部淹没，这也就是为什么在赫利奥波里斯和北部地区，人们会说原初土丘完全是由沙子组成的。

背景知识 7

埃及人的宇宙

宇宙区域：

外部的黑暗／原初海洋

上面的天空和天空之河／日间太阳的路线（可被表现为身上布满星星的天牛或赤裸身体的女神努特。上面的天空由舒及其帮手——海赫（Heh）神／荷鲁斯的儿子们／哈托尔之柱来支撑。）

空间／舒的地界

山脉／树木／天边的狮子（在一些图画上，努特的嘴部在西地平线，胯部在东地平线。）

圆形大地以埃及为中心，周围是沙漠和异国的土地。

“度阿特”冥界／内部天空／奥西里斯的王国

冥界之河／夜间太阳的路线（有时被认为在大地的下面，有时被认为在努特的体内。）

深渊／原初海洋

像古阿棺（图 5）一样的棺椁可以表现微型的宇宙，棺盖内部绘有一个星辰时钟或一幅天空女神的画像，棺的底部绘有一幅冥界的地图。在某些时期，埃及神庙的设计旨在象征最新被创造出来的宇宙，神庙的围墙相当于环绕四周的原初海洋，地穴代表冥界，塔门[1]代表天边的山脉，屋顶代表上面的天空。

尼罗河控制着河谷定居者的生活，因此对埃及人来说，他们不可能设想出一个没有这样一条河流的王国。在埃及人的宇

[1] 古埃及神庙特有的庙门形式，因建在两座对称斜壁的巨塔之间而得名。一座座塔门将神庙的围墙隔断，通往神庙的主体建筑。

宙观中，天空中的天国以及冥界里都有一条贯穿的河流（参见背景知识 7）。在其他文明中，人们想象的是太阳驾着马车穿越天空，而在埃及文明里，太阳、月亮以及星星都是乘着船在天空中航行。埃及的一个名字就是“两岸”，因为尼罗河既统一了这个国家，同时也将这个国家分为两部分。

在许多地方，尼罗河谷都只有几英里宽，但河上没有架桥，因此要从河的一边到达对岸总是有溺水而亡或被鳄鱼吞没的危险，危险的水上航行就成为埃及神话的中心内容。太阳神所乘的船受到一群野驴或者混沌毒蛇阿波斐斯的攻击；载着奥西里斯尸首的船在太阳神再次升起之前不得不在一群敌人中间穿过。像古阿这样的死者要使用《双路书》作为他的向导，以便在冥界之河上航行。

尼罗河的东岸是日出之地，因此是生者的国界，最适宜建造城镇和神庙。西岸是日落之地，被认为是死者之所，适合建造坟墓和丧葬神庙，冥界的另外一个名称就是“美丽的西方”。

海怪与风暴之神

埃及人还认为他们的领土被分成了两部分——泛滥平原上的肥沃“黑土地”与周围沙漠中的贫瘠“红土地”。奥西里斯、伊西丝和荷鲁斯与“黑土地”相关联，而塞特、涅菲悌斯和阿努比斯则与“红土地”联系在一起。在河水泛滥带来了水和淤泥之后，泛滥平原上的庄稼就可能会有非常好的收成。然而，宝贵的“黑土地”也不断地受到来自地中海和沙漠的威胁。

地中海被称为“伟大的绿色”(the Great Green)，但对这个海洋更普遍的称呼是“环绕者”(the Encircler)。诞生了造物主的原初海洋仍然被认为是环绕着这个世界。埃及的北部海岸依靠淤泥的每年沉积而保持在海平面以上，但海边的城镇可

能因为地震或海啸就被淹没在大海中，盐碱化的土地无法继续耕种。因此难怪有一则神话把大海比作一头贪婪的怪兽，以淹没整个大地相威胁，来索要越来越多的贡品，其中包括美丽的女神阿斯塔特(Astarte)。后来，最强大的神塞特在战斗中取胜，赶走了海怪。这个故事似乎改编自叙利亚的一则乌伽里特神话，但它也与人们对于地势较低的东部三角洲的担忧有很大关系，在那里塞特是一位非常受欢迎的神。

埃及人认为尼罗河最根本的源头在原初海洋，河水的泛滥被描述为要使埃及回到它原初的状态。需要通过水渠和堤坝体系来对洪水进行谨慎的控制。当洪水水位高于平均值时，村庄就将被冲毁，人们会被淹死；但当水位低于平均值时，庄稼就将减产，人们就会挨饿。河床无情的变化可能会慢慢地摧毁定居点，这一切似乎已经在古代孟斐斯的大部分地区发生过了。

人们崇拜尼罗河的神圣的控制者，比如造物主和星辰女神，而并没有崇拜尼罗河本身。一些神庙中展示了 16 只花瓶或者 16 个表现洪水泛滥益处的人格化的哈匹神形象，以体现尼罗河完美的水位。随着时间的推移，许多核心神话都被重新改造，以解释河水泛滥的现象并确保这一现象持续下去。伊西丝为她死去的丈夫所流下的眼泪、奥西里斯的躯体中渗出的物质，都被说成是引起河水泛滥的原因。河水泛滥带来生命和死亡的力量与“遥远女神”的神话联系在一起。“遥远女神”是拉神的女儿，与父亲争吵后前往沙漠居住，最后只得被劝说回来。

构成“红土地”的沙漠蕴含着宝贵的资源，比如矿藏和建筑石料，但是为了开采这些资源，人们要进行长途跋涉，其间要经历饥渴、沙暴、因炎热导致的疲惫或者暴雨导致的骤发洪水的死亡威胁。沙漠中开垦出来的土地可能被猛烈的风暴完全吞没，据说这种风暴是由塞特神在天上打雷引起的，同时这些土地也可能被巨大的沙丘那缓慢但不停歇的移动所吞噬。有必

要排除灌溉水渠中的沙子，这项任务对于埃及人来说非常紧迫，他们甚至期望在死后也能够继续做这项工作。古阿的外棺是《夏勃梯咒文》的最早史料来源之一，咒文召唤一名会巫术的人代表死者来排沙。正是考虑到了这些环境因素的作用，埃及神话把生命构建成为秩序与混沌之间不断的斗争就不足为奇了。在这场斗争中，要求所有人都恪尽职守。

进入沼泽

许多古代文化的神话和民间传说中都有男英雄或女英雄离开家园、进入一片大森林或丛林之类的故事。他们在那里会有一番历险，遇到神奇的生物。这是一段富有开创性与变化性的旅程，美女可能遇到野兽，骑士可能杀死恶龙或找到真正的圣杯。然而，埃及人没有森林，也没有丛林，但他们可以把有序世界抛弃一边，进入一片沼泽或沙漠中。

尼罗河谷的边缘地带以及三角洲的部分地区仍有大片荒凉的沼泽。在埃及的艺术与文学中，沼泽被认为是欢乐与危险同在的地方，也是伟大的野牛神哈托尔－塞克海特（Hathor-Sekhet）、湖泊之神索贝克（Sobek）以及眼镜蛇女神瓦吉特的圣地。在坟墓中的壁画上，墓主人在这些神的领地渔猎。三角洲宁静的芦苇丛激发了埃及人对天堂的想象，所以天堂也称为“苇子的原野”。人们乐于想象在高大的纸莎草丛中隐藏着齐米斯浮岛，伊西丝在那里诞下她非凡的儿子荷鲁斯。“梅特涅石碑”上刻的一个故事讲述了伊西丝与她7只带有魔力的蝎子如何从塞特手中逃脱并在遥远的沼泽村避难。在被一位富有的妇人拒绝之后，伊西丝得到了一位渔妇的收留，于是作为报复，蝎子螫了那位妇人的孩子。当那位富有的妇人把她的财产给了渔妇之后，伊西丝治愈了她的孩子。这个故事很可能反映了在现实生活中，三角洲是政治动乱时期受逃亡者欢迎的藏身之处。

在一篇中王国时期的文献残片中有一段动人的故事，一位牧人在浸水草甸放牛时，在湖边遇到了一位女神，这位女神的相貌非常可怖，牧人见了她吓得头发直立四肢发抖，但他拒不离开这个地方。于是在他们第二次相遇时，这位女神又化身成为一位赤裸身体的迷人女子。残片到这里就截止了，因此我们无从知晓牧人是否接受了女神的性爱引诱，而这又是否导致他丢掉性命。塞特神就因为在类似情况下没有抵挡住他所遇见的女神的诱惑而遭受到严厉的惩罚。

走出河谷

尼罗河谷边的群山外同样也有危险的神兽。直到大约公元前1500年以前，沙漠都被说成是怪兽的家园，那里生活着狮鹫、长颈兽（蛇头猫科怪兽）以及混合了几种奇异动物特点的塞特生物，等等。吉萨的狮身人面斯芬克斯就是一种沙漠神兽，在战斗中代表秩序一方。图特摩斯四世国王(King Thutmose IV)——阿蒙霍泰普三世的父亲，声称当他躺在斯芬克斯的阴影中睡觉的时候，这个神兽曾跟他讲话，它抱怨沙子都快要掩埋它的身体了，使它无法保护王室的陵墓。随着离埃及最近的沙漠变得越来越贫瘠，艺术作品中的怪兽形象也越来越少，由于沙漠失去了绝大多数野生动物和植被，因而怪兽们也不愿再呆在这个空旷的家园里了。

在沙漠深处是“遥远女神”，或者被称为“远游女神”的领地。有关她的故事有时被认为发生在西部（利比亚）沙漠，有时在南部（努比亚）沙漠或者蓬特的遥远土地上。化身成为野猫、母狮或者母狮鹫的女神在这些地方漫游。那些被派去寻找她的神祇们在冒险接近她以前不得不化身为猿或猴。智慧神图特费尽口舌才说服这位被疏远的拉神的女儿离开寂寞的荒野，回到尼罗河谷的文明社会中。他告诉她在失去了她光芒四射的风采

之后，埃及变得多么荒芜。他还给她讲了表现神界秩序运行情况的故事，在其中一个故事中，一只飞虫的死亡都得到了拉神的关注，最终由狮鹫——太阳神最厉害的使者，为这只飞虫报了仇。

在文学作品中，厄运往往会降临在那些离开埃及的人的身上：一位水手亲眼见到他的所有同伴都被淹死（《船舶遇难者的故事》）；无辜的巴塔(Bata)遭遇妻子的背叛和士兵的谋杀(《两兄弟的故事》)；一位王子遭到一条蛇、一条狗和一只鳄鱼的攻击（《注定厄运的王子》）；一位祭司受到海盗的劫掠（《温阿蒙航海记》）。而这些故事的正常结局都是男主人翁最终回到埃及，而且比当初离开时更加睿智，巴塔就是至少经历了 3 次生死关头之后得以活下来，并成为了埃及国王。

埃及文学中一个最受人欢迎的作品就是有关辛努(Sinuhe)的故事。在故事的一开始，辛努被卷入一场杀害阿蒙尼姆赫特一世国王(King Amenemhet I,约公元前 1985—前 1956)的阴谋中，于是逃离了埃及，被迫与“沙漠居住者”生活在一起，并娶了一位酋长的女儿为妻，还在一场格斗中战胜了敌方的勇士。但他始终渴望回到家乡，对于辛努来说，没有什么比他能够葬在故乡的土地上更重要的事情了。最终，新继位的国王满足了他的愿望。在埃及人的心目当中，他们国家所有的土地都是神圣的，但是，许多人还是感到与家乡的地方神祇有一种特殊的联系。

地方神祇与地方性神话

从很早以前开始，一个定居点不论有多大，它都会建起一个圣坛献给掌管这个地区的男神或女神。在一些时期，地区的长官也是地方神祇的高级祭司。最终埃及的 42 个诺姆（行政区划）都拥有了各自的一个或一组官方神祇，每个诺姆都使用类似于纹章图案的一个或一套符号来代表自己，这些符号可能与诺姆的神或诺姆最初的名称相关，例如，第十七个上埃及

诺姆被称为“豺诺姆”，它被表现成带着一根羽毛的豺神坐像，而掌管这个诺姆的神就是豺神阿努比斯；第十五个上埃及诺姆被称为“野兔诺姆”，它被表现成一只野兔，但掌管该诺姆的神是图特和赫利奥波里斯的“八神团”。古阿就是为“野兔诺姆”的长官工作，这位长官名叫杰胡特霍泰普（Djehutyhotep，意为“图特是亲切的”），图特的住所可能已被标记在古阿的冥界地图上，因为图特是他的地方神。

地方性的传统常常被记录在列有圣灵、圣地以及圣物的名单上。人们在塔尼斯发现的一张纸草上就写有每个诺姆的节庆、禁忌、墓地、神圣的动物和鱼、蛇神、圣树、土丘以及湖泊。这些清单使人们在看到神庙艺术所体现的信仰一致性的同时，也了解到埃及人信仰的多样性。在一个诺姆中，猎杀鳄鱼可能是禁忌，因为鳄鱼代表着仁慈的索贝克神；而在另一个诺姆中，猎杀鳄鱼就可能被认为是一个宗教行动，因为鳄鱼是“塞特的追随者”，曾与善良的奥西里斯和荷鲁斯神作战。在一些保存至今的纸草上，这些清单被扩展成了地方神话。

最为丰富的史料来源是一部被称为《尤米尔哈克纸草》的插图纸草卷，它的年代可追溯到约公元前4世纪，其内容包括解释“豺诺姆”的独有特征的神话，例如地点名称、宗教仪式、不寻常的植物、矿藏或者地形特征。其中一部分内容讲述了一群“塞特追随者”曾经聚集在某一座山上，阿努比斯在夜间攻击了他们，一次进攻就割断了他们所有的头颅，这座山上洒满了鲜血，这也就是这个地区仍然出产红色矿物的原因。这是一个严格意义上的地方神话，但它也是国家神话的一个部分：荷鲁斯与塞特之间的斗争。

《尤米尔哈克纸草》上几乎所有的神话都是核心神话的地方化的复述。“豺诺姆”的河岸、城镇以及山坡分别成为奥西里斯的埋葬地、塞特的战败地以及荷鲁斯和伊西丝的取胜之地。

其他许多地方也有同样套路的神话。位于阿拜多斯的一座早王朝王室墓在中王国时期被重新解释成奥西里斯的埋葬之所。到公元前 1000 年，据说伊西丝把奥西里斯已被肢解的身体碎块分别埋葬在了埃及的各个诺姆中，他的头被认为葬在了北部的布塞利斯，一条腿葬在了埃及南端的比伽岛，他身体的每一部分都能够代表整个身体，使得其所在的地区神圣化。

不寻常的地形特征，如长有古树的一座山丘、或者与神话中天边的山脉相似的悬崖上的隘口，都可能会建立起这个地方与神话之间的联系。随着时间的推移，这些联系又通过宗教仪式行为得到加强，这些行为可能是一个奠酒祭神仪式上所说的几个词语，也可能是用上千个演员对于神话素精心地反复表演。一旦一个圣地与一个核心神话关联起来并成为朝圣之地，那么它还将引出更多的神话联想。

这些联想可以通过对地形的人工改造而得到加强。山丘被建造起来作为原初土丘或者奥西里斯的栖息地；神庙里挖掘出湖泊或者池塘，如同索贝克－拉和阿蒙霍泰普三世这尊雕像所在的池塘一样，它们代表着原初海洋或代表着荷鲁斯与塞特发生水战的地点。埃及的主要神庙与政府之间有共生共存的关系，因此这样大型的改造工程必然少不了王室的资助，下一章我们将讨论王室与神话之间的联系。

第六章

两土地之王：国家神话

在许多人看来，图坦卡蒙(Tutankhamun)的金面具就是古埃及人的脸孔。图坦卡蒙的短暂统治(约公元前1336—前1327)标志着在阿玛尔纳时期的“宗教改革”之后，王权又回归到了正统的模式。在阿玛尔纳时期，国王埃赫那吞废除了过去所有的国家神话与地方性神话，而代之以他的太阳神阿吞创造世界的故事。在这个神话中，阿吞似乎是在没有争议的情况下创造并统治了世界，奥西里斯惨遭谋害的黑暗神话以及秩序与混沌之间的血腥战争都被禁止再提。

图坦卡蒙墓中的珍宝可以使我们了解许多神话，包括那些以冲突为主题的神话。一个木制的圣龛中放置着一对镀金的小雕像，雕像表现的是年轻的国王站在一条由纸莎草根制成的小船上的场景。在如图所示的雕像中，图坦卡蒙戴着下埃及的红冠(图6)。王冠以及代表王权的其他重要物品被认为可以赋予国王神一般的权力，因此只要戴上这个王冠，图坦卡蒙就不再需要用富丽的长袍或者贵重的珠宝来强调自己的地位。

这位年轻的国王一手持着鱼叉，另一只手拿着一卷绳索，一幅欲投掷鱼叉的样子，如此呼之欲出的姿态在王室雕像中非常罕见。国王想要捕猎的目标是一匹公河马，但由于这种动物过于危险，因而被禁止出现在王室的陵墓中。

图 6. 图坦卡蒙持鱼叉的镀金小雕像

捕猎河马

在图坦卡蒙下葬的前 1,500 年，国王扮作河马捕猎者的主题就出现在埃及早期国王的器物上。河马牙在过去是一种非常贵重的商品，但在易翻的小船上用铜制武器捕猎河马是一项非常危险的活动。一位身强力壮的成年男子也得要刺许多下，才能使河马失血过多而变得虚弱，这相当于古埃及版的斗牛活动，传说中的埃及统一者美尼斯国王 (King Menes) 据说就是被一头河马害死的。

最早的埃及领袖可能要通过领导这种捕猎行动来证明他们的价值，但身体虚弱的图坦卡蒙很可能都没有获准接近过一匹真正的河马，医药史学家最近的研究表明，如果没有手杖，这位年轻的国王几乎无法站立。从某种意义上讲，捕猎河马可能只是象征性行为，通过艺术表现或“切河马蛋糕”这样的宗教仪式行动都可以实现其主要目标——秩序对混沌的胜利。

河马的许多特征使人们将之与混沌势力联系在一起。在白天，河马就潜伏在水下，如同混沌水域中的原初怪兽；到了夜晚，它们上岸啃食、踩踏庄稼以及所经过之处的一切东西。雄性河马互相恶斗。许多河马都是粉红色的，而红色在埃及人的象征体系中是邪恶的颜色。在神话里，塞特化身为河马来攻击他的兄弟奥西里斯或他的侄子荷鲁斯，甚至反抗太阳神的统治。最终荷鲁斯神猎杀了塞特－河马神，用一根带有魔力的鱼叉刺得河马遍体鳞伤，这个行动与荷鲁斯用他的矛制服原初海洋从而使创世开始的神话相呼应。

持鱼叉者小雕像把图坦卡蒙理想为黄金荷鲁斯王，是杀死混沌怪兽并拯救世界的英雄。但在现实生活中，这样一场战斗胜利的天平会偏向河马一边，每位生活在尼罗河边的人对此都

心知肚明。埃及人并不把秩序一方的胜利作为预料之中的必然结果，来自混沌的威胁是非常真实的，就像有关美尼斯的传说一样，故事的结局并不总是皆大欢喜。埃及人的世界观使他们相信王权体系对于文明的延续是必不可少的。

国王与国家

美利坚合众国的创立者们虽然举起了反英国王权统治的大旗，但他们却非常钟情于古埃及的象征体系，这很具有讽刺意味，因为君主政治是古埃及社会的基本特征。人们认识古埃及的历史都要依照历史上国王名单的顺序，有时也把他们组合成王朝的结构。这些名单具有实际的功用，就是指明了那些要供奉的王室祖先。名单还为埃及创造出了一个连贯的历史，可以一直追溯到非常遥远的时代，也就是埃及还是由造物主太阳神以及之后的一系列神王直接统治的时代，这些神王包括奥西里斯和荷鲁斯在内。荷鲁斯的统治为后世的所有国王树立了一个榜样，所有忠诚的臣民都是“荷鲁斯的追随者”而非“塞特的追随者”。

公元前4千纪晚期的几位上埃及国王的事迹似乎都被归于统一者美尼斯的传说之中。在这个时期的王室物品中，国王可以被表现为一只鹰、一头公牛或一头狮子的形象，战胜了似乎包括北方“沼泽居民”在内的敌人。到大约公元前3100年，世界上第一个大型民族国家建立。人们对世袭君主领导的中央政府的忠诚取代了对家族组织、部落酋长或者城镇领袖的地方性忠诚。这种转变是如何实现的？最近的非洲历史表明这样的国家不能只靠自上而下的力量来维持，还需要人们心理和情感态度上的巨大变化来支持。

早期的国王似乎使用了多种方法。首先，他们将书写和艺术系统化，从而为他们的新国家树立了一个强大的形象，这非

常类似于我们今天使用标识和商标来提升品牌影响力。其次国王与所有的地方神祇都建立起关系，这样他就成为整个国的宗教领袖。再次，埃及的精英阶层推广了“好的权力”这概念，从而使中央政府被看成是神界秩序的一部分。

北方与南方的分歧并没有被掩饰，相反这种不同受到尊重埃及被称为“两土地”，分别用两套符号标志来代表上埃及下埃及，比如白冠与红冠、秃鹰与眼镜蛇、百合花与纸莎草早期的王室记录主要记载国王参加节庆活动或者在地方神庙建雕像的事情。当国王庆祝他的赫卜赛德节[1]时，上下埃及神祇们都会附体在各自的雕像上来证明国王的权力。

王抑或神？

国王的权力是基于神的权威，那么人们会把国王认作神吗？有关国王的“神圣性质”的说法很少在各个时期都样适用。*ntr* 一词频繁使用于王室头衔中，人们为在位的或去的国王举办雕像祭仪。加冕仪式以及许多王权的标识物证明国王是不断更新世界的造物主太阳神在人间的代表，使得国王在神界的统治集团中占有一个权威的位置。约夫·坎贝尔（Joseph Campbell）认为，随着埃及国家的建神圣的国王成为了神王。他指出，在公元前3千纪的大部时段内，“神话中的身份认同”（mythic identification）被话中的自命不凡”（mythic inflation）所取代，也就是国王体原本要通过他所扮演的神圣角色体现出来，而在后来则神要通过国王的身体体现出来。

[1] 古埃及最古老的节日之一。传统是自国王登基30周年的纪念日开始3年庆祝一次，但实际上根据法老的个人爱好而有所变化。

在宗教艺术与文学中，国王能够扮演许多神话角色，比如天空的舒，或者在沼泽中吮吸着母牛女神的乳汁的小荷鲁，这些场景通常要早于对神亲自做这些事的表现。图坦卡蒙为持鱼叉的荷鲁斯的雕像在时间上就要先于表现荷鲁斯本人杀化身为兽的塞特的情景的其他任何物品，如“梅特涅石碑”。室统治似乎成为了一个限制叙事神话发展以及用图画表现神的艺术形式发展的主要因素。

从第五王朝（约公元前2494—前2345）起，国王开始使用“拉之子”这个头衔（参见背景知识8）。国王最多地被表现成神的爱而顺从的儿子，他是人间唯一可以代表人类向神说情的人。子关系”中的一类就是建立在国王在宗教仪式上等同于荷鲁的基础之上。在埃及宗教中，有两位重要的神都叫荷鲁斯：大鲁斯是一只宇宙之鹰，他的眼睛就是太阳和月亮；而小荷鲁斯伊西丝的儿子，是与塞特作战、为父亲奥西里斯复仇然后继承位成为埃及统治者的王室之后。埃及的国王与这两位神都有联，但到了中王国时期，最具权威性的一个公式则为：健在的国＝小荷鲁斯、已故的国王＝奥西里斯。《拉美修姆戏剧纸草》有描写一个王室宗教仪式的内容，该仪式反复表现了奥西里死亡又复活以及荷鲁斯和他的儿子们战胜塞特的故事，但我们不清楚这个中王国时期的宗教仪式是举行于新国王的加冕庆典还是老国王的葬礼中。

在这一时期，国王在宗教仪式上等同于神的概念通过精英层的传播，扩展到像古阿棺木上的咒文一样的丧葬咒文之中，至还出现在日常生活中的具有治病和保护作用的巫术中。这许就是神和国王之间可以发展出一种更特别的关系的原因。载在《韦斯特卡尔纸草》上的中王国后期故事集中有一个“王出生神话”的早期例子。第五王朝的前3位统治者都被一位人说成是拉神的儿子，他们神奇诞生，那时伊西丝和涅菲悌这两个姐妹、青蛙女神海克特以及分娩女神迈斯克海奈特

(Meskhenet) 都在场，克努姆神还在他们出生时赐予他们 3 人健康。

背景知识 8

国王的名字和头衔

早期的国王把他们的名字写在 *serekh*（王宫门面）之中，这是一个矩形方框，上方有一只猎鹰，它表示这个国王等同于“王宫中的荷鲁斯”。后来，国王在登基时都使用 5 个名称。第一个是“荷鲁斯名称”，第二个是“两位女士名称”，第三个是“黄金荷鲁斯”名称。这些与荷鲁斯相关的名称显示出国王像荷鲁斯神一样强大、无敌。“两位女士”是涅赫伯特与瓦吉特，分别为上下埃及的守护女神，这个名称强调了国王在埃及统一中的地位。

第四个名字是国王的首名，被写于一个装饰框中，跟在衔名 *nsw-bity* 的后面，字面意思为“他是莎草和蜜蜂的”，上下埃及的另一对象征符号。它还被说成是代表了国王的双重身份，一方面是有限时间内的个体，另一方面是玛阿特永恒的拥护者。这个名字还经常与拉神的名字相结合，例如尼布－玛阿特－拉，意为“拉神是玛阿特的王”，它是阿蒙霍泰普三世的首名。

第五个名字是中间名，也被写在一个装饰框中，跟在短语“拉神之子”的后面。这个名字是家族名，我们今天仍然以此称呼埃及国王，比如阿蒙霍泰普（阿蒙神是亲切的）、图特摩斯（图特诞生）或者图坦卡蒙（阿蒙神在人间的形象）。这些名字有时还反映了一个王朝对其发源地的地方神的忠诚，例如塞提一世（Seti I，意为“他是塞特的”）家族就来自于三角洲东部的一个地方，塞特崇拜在那里十分盛行。

人们认为克努姆在他的陶工旋盘上造出了人的身体和“卡”(ka)——一种生命力，新王国时期的神庙中描绘了他造人的情景，表现了统治者神圣的孕育与出生。卢克索神庙中的浮雕还表现了众神之王阿蒙－拉临幸一位王后诞生出一个非凡的婴儿的情景，这个孩子就是阿蒙霍泰普三世（参见图3)。当阿蒙霍泰普出生时，保护这个太阳之子、小荷鲁斯的神祇们都来向这位小王子及其母后致敬。

王室的“卡”似乎被视为一种永恒的力量，存在于每位国王的身体之中,而神的“卡”则被认为存在于宗教雕像中。“卡”这个词可能起源于埃及语“营养”一词，它的发音也很像“公牛”这个词，它们之间的联系在古代被认为是非常重要的。国王的“卡”维系着他的所有臣民，据说每位国王都成为了“他母亲的公牛”，从而产生出他自身的另一种形式，接任为下一任国王以及秩序的永恒拥护者。

秩序与混沌的对抗

人们认为埃及的国王有责任在人间建立玛阿特，他们通过建造神庙、向神和死者的灵魂献祭、将公正降于人间及保卫埃及的边界等行为来完成这个使命。一篇文本说明国王所扮演的角色就是“把玛阿特放置于伊斯法特（混沌）处”，这意味着伊斯法特被认为是事情的天然状态。国王所必须要战胜的混沌势力在图画中可以被表现为外国人、大群的候鸟或者不同的沙漠和沼泽动物，比如说羚羊、河马。在持鱼叉者小雕像中，国王的王冠上有一个盘绕着的眼镜蛇的标记，这个吐火的眼镜蛇女神被认定是每位合法国王的忠实伴侣，在神话中，她是拉神丢失了的眼睛，后来回到太阳神的额头上并化身成蛇的形象以击败太阳神的敌人。

混沌也并不被说成是完全邪恶的，像混沌的原初海洋之神努恩就被尊奉为造物主的“父亲”。这意味着混沌中的一些元素对于生存来说是必需的，因此要利用它们而不是除掉它们。当秩序势力面对贪得无厌的大海或者巨蛇阿波斐斯等怪兽的时候，他们也需要用到混沌神塞特的能量和力量。人被认为拥有在玛阿特和伊斯法特之间作出选择的能力。在《双路书》（《石棺铭文》1130）里的一篇咒文中，造物主说他命令人们不要做坏事，但这些人的心没有服从他。像造物主一样，人们有权通过他们的思想来创造他们自己的现实生活。在神话《人类的毁灭》中，人们由于背叛了“神王拉”的权威而走上死亡之路。背叛好的权力从而导致恶果的暗示在埃及的文学作品中比比皆是。

一篇被称为《忠诚者教谕》的中王国文本赋予了在位国王两个神话角色：一个是把光、水和空气赐予人类的造物主太阳神，另一个是吞下了秩序敌人的可怕的狮子女神。这种跨性别的身份等同并不奇怪，因为狮子女神就是眼睛女神的一种表现形式，而眼睛女神最初就是太阳神的一部分。《忠诚者教谕》声称埃及需要严密的组织，目的是为了保卫国家、利用泛滥的河水以及生产出足够的食物以保证工匠的生产活动。但这种和平与繁荣的福祉需要以丧失个人及地方的自由为代价来获得，协助国王进行统治的精英阶层享有的这种繁荣成果比其他任何人都多，因此很有兴趣延续这一体制。然而令人惊讶的是，一些由这个精英阶层创作的或是为这个阶层创作的文学作品却不满个别国王的统治。

做坏事的国王

在文学作品中，体现好的权力的通常都不是国王，而是诚实的官员或者博学的祭司和巫师。现存的埃及传说直言不讳地描绘了王室的种种劣迹。在《韦斯特卡尔纸草》中，一位农

民兼巫师斥责国王胡夫想拿人做实验。在《尼斐尔卡拉国王和萨撒奈特的故事》中，国王与一位将军干了不合法的勾当。在《梵蒂尔纸草》中，一个国王为了苟活而牺牲了一位忠诚的臣民，之后他还霸占了这位臣民的妻子和财产。在《两兄弟的故事》里，一个国王抢走了别人的妻子，并允许他的新王后杀死一头圣牛。

到埃及旅行的古典作家记述了有关古代国王的更骇人听闻的故事，故事中说他们强暴自己的女儿，或者逼迫她们去做妓女，从而为他们的建筑工程积累资金。这样的一些故事之所以能够产生，就是因为神话素已经从神界变换到人间，但埃及人似乎已把圣洁的政府与掌管这个政府的易犯错的个人作了严格的区分。同样的态度似乎也出现在以埃及国王和王后身份进行统治的神祇们的故事中。

神本身被认为存在于两个类型的时间段：一个是通过宗教仪式可获得的不断持续的现在，另一个是与现在完全不同的遥远的过去。在前一个时间段里，神是强大的宇宙力量，他们之间的相互作用不受微不足道的人类意识的左右；而在后一个时间段，神带有了欲望和情感，他们也会犯错误。在神话《拉神的秘密名字》中，太阳神中了伊西丝的毒，被哄骗着赋予了伊西丝超越太阳神的力量。在《人类的毁灭》中，神王拉对于如何处置叛乱的人类犹豫不决，甚至苦恼得无法继续呆在人间。在这两个神话中，拉神都向众神征求意见，这就如同指望埃及国王在作出决断之前要听取他的大臣们的意见一样。

在记录于公元前1千纪晚期的一个神话中，盖伯神放逐了他的父亲舒神并逼迫他的母亲泰富努特做自己的王后，随后他被他王冠上的眼镜蛇女神烧灼。“他的母亲的公牛”是一个令人费解的说法，但这个说法已被按字面意思理解，并被转变成为一个乱伦和子女叛乱的故事。图坦卡蒙持鱼叉小雕像蕴含

了另一个神话情节，它以王位继承为中心主题：即荷鲁斯和塞特之间围绕谁应该成为国王这个问题而展开的斗争。在古埃及3,000年的历史中，这是一个最重要的国家神话。在位的国王都被更密切地等同于荷鲁斯而非其他的神，然而这个斗争有许多不同的结果。下一章我们就将详细探讨这个神话的一个版本以及对它的多种解读方式。

第七章

一场大战：斗争与和解

在位于都柏林的彻斯特比提图书馆的珍宝中，有一部名为《彻斯特比提蒲纸本一号》的纸草卷，上面记载有大量诗歌和散文体的文学作品，其中包括一个名为《荷鲁斯与塞特的争斗》（以下简称《争斗》）的神话故事（图 7）。这个纸草卷曾经是一个私人图书馆的收藏，这个私人图书馆所属的家族在新王国后期西底比斯的王室墓地生活和工作。《争斗》是用僧侣体文字书写而成，这和《彻斯特比提蒲纸本一号》中的另一篇文本相同，那是一篇庆祝拉美西斯五世国王（King Ramesses V，约公元前 1156—前 1151）继位的赞美诗，书写这两篇文本的书吏可能也是它们的编创者。《争斗》中的许多事件都可以在更早的史料中找到蛛丝马迹，但这些事件的组合方式在其他的神话版本中是找不到的。

《争斗》是古埃及留存下来的篇幅最长的叙述故事之一，也是最具争议的作品之一。这个文本曾被视为一篇纯粹的娱乐作品或一篇睿智的讽刺作品或一篇情节复杂的小说或一个改编过的神话故事。《争斗》还曾被用于阐释埃及国王的登基大典、埃及的统一过程、中王国时期王室力量的兴起、新王国晚期王室权威的衰落、性别问题以及埃及法律体系的运作方式等研究主题。弗洛伊德学派、结构主义者和后结构主义者都曾分析过

图 7.《彻斯特比提蒲纸本一号》上的《荷鲁斯与塞特的争斗》故事原文

这个故事，并得出多种结论。对于《争斗》的多样化的解读表明，任何一个埃及神话都没有一种标准化的解读方式。

一个令人震惊的故事

宗教文本一般都用经典的中埃及语写成，但《争斗》的大部分却是以新王国晚期的通俗语言写成的。故事中的神常常以口语化的方式讲话，而不是用神庙铭文中的词藻华丽的语言，故事主人公的行事方式也不像神庙浮雕上的神那般得体、端庄。在埃及国家神话的这个版本里，太阳神无法下定决心去做正确的事情，而且在遭到反对时还怒气冲天；荷鲁斯，这位所有埃及国王的典范，竟然为赢得一场竞赛而采取了欺骗行径，而且在一气之下还砍了他母亲的头；塞特，一些新王国时期统治者的保护神，被描写成了一个暴虐而好色的小丑（参见背景知识 9 中的故事梗概）。

在《争斗》译本的导言中，E.F. 温特 (E. F. Wente) 认为"一些伟大的神的行为在各方面都如此令人震惊，以至于很难想象其中没有调侃的意味。"一些学者相信调侃的元素使得《争斗》不能被视为神话，而只能是纯粹的娱乐作品；但另一些学者则指出，在许多文化中，提供有意义的娱乐元素也是神话的一项重要功能。

《争斗》的现代读者可能认为居于西底比斯的受过教育的埃及人已不再相信他们的神，但大量的考古证据都驳斥了这种观点。在大墓地工作的书吏们建造了他们的家族祭坛，修建并维护他们村落共同体的神殿，参加宗教节庆活动，并且还用神的图像装饰他们自己的坟墓。实际上，这篇文本中的批评之语针对的似乎更像是国王及其代表，他们把自己等同于太阳神及其顾问团的神祇们。荷鲁斯抱怨说他为获取正义而斗争了80年，这一定触动了当时的听众们的心弦，因为我们知道底比斯的一些法律诉讼也会拖上很多年。有关遗产继承的纠纷也很常见，

从现存的法律卷宗可以看出，寡妇与遗孤（比如伊西丝与荷鲁斯）要想获得他们的权利是多么地艰难，即使法律是站在他们这一边。

背景知识 9

《荷鲁斯与塞特的争斗》故事梗概

荷鲁斯与塞特对于谁该成为国王的问题争论不休，他们之间的争吵惊扰了整个埃及。年轻的荷鲁斯出现在神的法庭上，要求继承他死去的父亲奥西里斯的王位。有几个神认为荷鲁斯所说是正确的，但万能之王（造物主太阳神）对于法庭没有咨询他的意见就作出判决的做法恼羞成怒。塞特提出应该通过一场决斗来解决这个问题。图特写信给奈特，咨询她的意见。奈特回信威胁说，如果不把王位给荷鲁斯，那么她就要使天空撞击大地。法庭赞同奈特的意见，但这使得太阳神更加愤怒。太阳神告诉荷鲁斯他不适合做国王，因为他还只是一个瘦弱的小男孩儿，这激怒了其他神，其中的一位神辱骂了太阳神。

太阳神被这件事搅得心烦意乱，他躺在他的帐篷里拒绝起身，直到他的女儿哈托尔把她的外阴展示给他看。然后太阳神让荷鲁斯和塞特分别为自己申辩。塞特称他应该成为国王，因为他是唯一一个强大到可以保护太阳神免受混沌巨蛇每日攻击的神祇。于是太阳神希望把王位给予塞特，但其他神都抗议说荷鲁斯的理由更充分。伊西丝变得非常愤怒，于是众神都尽力让她平静下来，这反过来激怒了塞特，他威胁说如果不禁止伊西丝进入法庭，他将每天杀死一位神。

众神同意在河中的一个岛上会面，他们命令神界摆渡者奈姆提（Nemty）不要载伊西丝到这个岛上来。伊西丝把自己假扮成一个老妪，并用一枚金戒指贿赂了奈姆提。她一到岛上，就把自己变成了一个美丽的年轻女子，以使塞特为她着迷。她给塞特讲述了一个哀伤的故事，讲的是一个陌生人如何夺走了她儿子的牲畜（“牲畜”这个词在埃及语中的发音与“遗产”一词非常接近）。塞特宣称这个行为非常无耻，于是伊西丝告诉塞特他已宣判他自己有罪。其他的神都同意伊西丝的说法，但他们也答应了塞特严惩奈姆提的要求。

太阳神早上和晚上的两种形式都宣布荷鲁斯应成为国王，但塞特不接受这个裁决，他要求和荷鲁斯进行一场竞赛，内容是他们两人都化身成为河马，看谁能够在水下呆得更久。伊西丝担心荷鲁斯会溺水而亡，于是试着用她有魔力的鱼叉去刺塞特，第一下她刺中了荷鲁斯，而当她用鱼叉去刺塞特的时候，塞特提醒她他们两人本是姐弟，于是伊西丝放走了塞特。荷鲁斯跃出水面，砍下了伊西丝的头。太阳神让图特治愈了伊西丝并让荷鲁斯受罚。塞特找到了熟睡的荷鲁斯，挖出他的双眼并掩埋起来。哈托尔发现了已双目失明的荷鲁斯，并用瞪羚的奶水使他的眼睛复原，荷鲁斯那被掩埋的眼睛长成了莲花。

众神劝荷鲁斯和塞特和解，于是塞特邀请荷鲁斯来他家做客。晚上，塞特试图与荷鲁斯发生性关系，想以此取得优势地位，但荷鲁斯把塞特的精子抓在手中。荷鲁斯告诉了伊西丝这件事，于是伊西丝砍下他被玷污的手，又给他做了个新的。然后她摩擦荷鲁斯的阴茎，得到了他的一些精子，并将之洒在塞特花园中的莴苣上。当塞

特吃了这些莴苣之后，他就怀上了荷鲁斯的孩子。在法庭上，塞特嘲笑荷鲁斯听命于他，荷鲁斯让图特分别召唤他自己的精子与塞特的精子，看看它们都在哪里作答。塞特的精子于水中应答，而荷鲁斯的精子则在塞特的体内作出了应答。图特召唤荷鲁斯的精子，它从塞特的头中出来，形成一个闪闪发亮的圆盘，图特把这个圆盘置于自己的头上。

法庭宣布荷鲁斯的主张有理，但塞特又提出了另一项比赛：在石头制成的船里进行较量。塞特用一个山顶造了一条大船，而荷鲁斯用木头制成了船，然后把它涂上石头的颜色，使它看起来是石头制成的。塞特的石头船沉没了，于是塞特变成了一匹河马来攻击荷鲁斯的船，荷鲁斯用鱼叉刺塞特河马，但被其他的神制止。荷鲁斯驶向舍易斯，向奈特抱怨说正义仍未获申张。

图特建议法庭写信给冥界的奥西里斯，咨询一下他的意见。奥西里斯读完信后就要求知悉为何荷鲁斯的长子继承权被骗走，他提醒法庭别忘了他可是创造出大麦和二粒小麦从而维持世界运转的人。太阳神回应他说，即使奥西里斯从未在这个世界上存在过，庄稼也能生长出来。这激怒了奥西里斯，他回信指责太阳神一手制造了不公。奥西里斯指出，冥界的怪兽是不怕任何神灵的，它们可以把所有犯错误的人的心脏拿去审判。众神承认奥西里斯所说是真的，于是阿图姆让伊西丝把塞特五花大绑带上法庭。

塞特在被囚禁之后，终于同意让荷鲁斯当国王。当荷鲁斯登基的时候，他的母亲伊西丝高兴地大叫起来。太阳神让塞特与他同住在天空，使他成为雷雨之神。在荷鲁斯成为国王的那一刻，天地同庆。

故事中像伊西丝被砍头、塞特怀孕等最惊世骇俗的事件都在其他的一些史料中曾被复述过，这些史料包括魔法文以及与神话事件发生时间相关的日历。塞特曾试图勾引或强暴他的侄子荷鲁斯，这在埃及2,000多年的文学史上一直是一个热门话题。《争斗》的创作者表现了非常丰富的、包括后来记载于《尤米尔哈克纸草》中的地方性神话在内的埃及神话知识。

斗争的起源

在19世纪，对于神话起源的解释有几个主要的思想学派。神话被视为对于自然界的力量或者天体运动的描述，或被视为被曲解或理想化了的历史，抑或被视为是对古老宗教仪式的解读。到了20世纪，神话被认为是思维层面以及人类认识世界和形成语言的能力的反映。所有这些理论都曾被用于阐释荷鲁斯与塞特之间的敌对关系。

在埃及宗教的早期阶段，荷鲁斯似乎被尊奉为一位天神，塞特作为沙子神和暴风雨之神的证据出现得稍晚，但这还是使一些学者把荷鲁斯和塞特视为自然界的对立力量。塞特窃取荷鲁斯之眼的神话素经常被认为是埃及人对于月蚀现象的解读。埃及人一定是把荷鲁斯或者他的眼睛等同于各种天体，比如正午的太阳、满月或是晨星。天文观测对于埃及神话形成具有一定影响力的理论现今非常流行。

神话将历史人物转变成为神祇的观念可以追溯到古代希腊，例如柏拉图就设想图特神曾经是远古的一个真实人物。这种理论在当代只有少数支持者，埃及学家们也认为除了荷鲁斯和塞特以外，几乎没有其他的神符合这个理论。最近的考古学证据已被拿来说明荷鲁斯与塞特神话起源于一场战争，也就是公元前4千纪晚期涅伽达（地方神是塞特）和希拉康波里斯（地方神是荷鲁斯）的统治者之间的一场战争。这并不是说荷鲁斯

与塞特都以某个历史人物为原型，只是说一场以他们的名义开战的战争可能塑造了有关这两位神祇的神话。

神话与历史

为应对不同的政治形势，荷鲁斯与塞特之间的斗争不断地被重新想象。在公元前2000年到公元前1000年的大部分时间，这个神话的大多数版本都在强调通过调解来结束斗争。当“双王”中的每一位都拥有了统治的王国（荷鲁斯占有黑土地、塞特占有红土地）的时候，和平就得以实现，然后这两位神将联合他们的力量支持神界的秩序。这似乎反映了解决内部纷争的一个实用而有效的途径。然而，当埃及在公元前1千纪经历了一系列毁灭性的被入侵和强占的命运之后，神话的重点也发生了变化，人们理想的斗争结局通常都变成了塞特被残忍地处决，他的追随者也被歼灭。

《争斗》所记载的这一特殊版本可能是受到了公元前12世纪麻烦不断的王位继承事件的影响，这个版本甚至可能就是对这些继承事件的评注。就在这个故事被记载下来的几年之前，一位王子躲过了他的一个兄弟的设计谋害，最终赢得了王位，这位王子的母亲就叫伊西丝。《彻斯特比提蒲纸本一号》的《赞美辞》称赞拉美西斯五世就是继承了他父亲奥西里斯王位的荷鲁斯，但却有证据表明他的继位引发了一场与他兄弟——也可能是侄子——拉美西斯六世(Ramesses VI)之间的内战。王室陵墓建造者们的生活可能被这些斗争严重扰乱，因此他们都希望可以用和平的方式解决这种继承危机，比如《争斗》最后分割权力的方法。

一位埃及学家指出，创作《赞美辞》和《争斗》都是为了在底比斯庆祝拉美西斯五世登基的节庆活动上诵读。《拉美修姆戏剧纸草》的存在显示了王权合法化是荷鲁斯与塞特神话的

明确目标。那么王室的宗教仪式也是这个神话的起源吗？还是说这个神话被王室篡改以适应他们的目的？当我们问及神话和宗教仪式孰先孰后的问题时，每种情况都必须具体情况具体判断。通常来说，已有的宗教仪式，比如说葬礼，似乎是通过与神话之间的关联地位逐渐得到提高的。

从神话中汲取知识

许多学者认为神话与宗教仪式在本质上是可以互换的，他们把神话视为“被口述的事件”，而把宗教仪式看作“被实践的事件”。然而结构主义创始人克劳德·列维－施特劳斯(Claude Lévi-Strauss)则对此持不同观点，所谓结构主义就是解读和分析文化与人类经验的各个层面的一种方法。列维－施特劳斯认为，当神话面对人类生活环境中的普遍问题与不可调和的矛盾冲突的时候，就要由宗教仪式来掩盖这些问题，好像它们根本不存在一样。具体表现荷鲁斯与塞特神话要素的王室仪式及丧葬仪式似乎都否认了存在于现实中的死亡与不和谐因素。在宗教仪式上，新国王总是荷鲁斯，这个可爱的儿子，继承了他父亲奥西里斯的王位。而与之形成对照的是，在《争斗》故事中，要在荷鲁斯与塞特之间作出选择被证明几乎是不可能的，因为他们似乎代表了一对相对立的概念，比如文化与自然。结构主义者罗伯特·奥登(Robert Oden)指出，《争斗》中“存在着复仇的二元对立”。他认为这个神话的结构清楚地说明了这些对立，而且也并不打算调和这些矛盾。果真如此的话，那么结构主义的分析就与对荷鲁斯与塞特神话的许多宗教分析恰恰相反。

弗洛伊德学派的学者把神话与塑造孩童心智的早期性幻想联系在一起，他们可以在《争斗》中找到许多有待研究的问题。荷鲁斯不得不同时面对几个形象，一个是遥远而被动的父亲形象（奥西里斯），一个是残暴而且使用性暴力的父亲形象（塞特），还有

一个是美貌但却盛气凌人的母亲形象（伊西丝）。在一些版本中，荷鲁斯是通过强暴伊西丝而非砍掉她的头来确立统治地位的，荷鲁斯的登基可以被解读成青年荷鲁斯终于长大成人。卡尔·荣格(Carl Jung)把奥西里斯视为为了个性化的实现而牺牲掉的或不得不改变的自我的一部分。在荣格有关埃及神话的著述中，荷鲁斯分别被说成是代表了光、人类、意识的觉醒以及完美的自我。

这些心理分析的方法可以使古代神话对于现代人来说也有意义，但对于公元前12世纪的埃及人来说，这些方法还是正确的吗？如同结构主义一样，这些分析忽视了特定文本已知的作用，比如使王权合法化的功能，同时也忽视了正在被解读的神话与讨论中的文化的“神话历史”之间的联系。如果单单从家族变迁的角度来解读《争斗》，那么就会使事件脱离它们发生的背景环境，例如，如果伊西丝与荷鲁斯关系中的性爱成分被视作一连串重复的神话事件的一部分，那么这种关系看上去就会有所不同了。

最基本的神话素是“女神挑逗男神以创造生命”。在被害的奥西里斯已经失去知觉后，伊西丝使用巫术唤起他的性欲，并最终孕育出荷鲁斯。在一些创世神话中，手女神使原初形态的太阳神阴茎勃起，由此孕育出第一批神，创世也得以开始。创世的方式还包括造物主用他的“种子”使植物受精，比如原初的莲花或芦苇。在《争斗》中，一棵莴苣在伊西丝挑逗荷鲁斯之后受精，这次受精诞生出了一个太阳圆盘，有如产生了创世的第一次日出。荷鲁斯身体里的每一样器官，包括他的眼睛，都可以创造出生命，这标志着他是造物主太阳神的真正继承人。

上述说法并没有否认荷鲁斯与塞特神话可能是由人类思维的基本原理所创造。埃及人的确用象征性的手法来解释事件，甚至有一些证据表明他们使用自己的神话来说明人类的行为活动。与《彻斯特比提蒲纸本一号》一样来自同一个私人图书馆的一篇新王国文本把人分成了“塞特的追随者”和“荷鲁斯的

追随者”两大派。“塞特派”被描述成脾气暴躁、淫荡好色、过于情绪化；而“荷鲁斯派”则相反，他们可能早就学会了如何控制自己的欲望和情绪，从而有效地行事。这篇文本后面还有一些梦的解析，而这些解析都以做梦者的“人物类型”为基础。

荷鲁斯的胜利

埃及学家米切尔·布洛兹(Michèle Broze)认为埃及人运用神话的方式异常复杂，她把《争斗》视为一部精致的文学作品。她指出，这篇文本并没有无意义的赘述，而是以逐渐确立荷鲁斯的继承权的双元事件为线索。其中有两个加冕礼场景，一个失败而另一个成功；像征求神谕一样征求两位神(奈特和奥西里斯)的意见；伊西丝经历了两次变身；女神哈托尔复活了两位神祇(太阳神和荷鲁斯)；两次涉及化身河马的战斗就是一个有趣的例子，它包含了带有正反两方面价值的双元事件。

第一个事件是一种神裁法，两位神都化身成河马跳入海中。当荷鲁斯变成一个与毁灭相关的生物进入混沌之水的时候，他就变得狂躁起来。他勃然大怒，砍下了他母亲的头，这可是违背事物自然秩序的罪行，最后他还没能证明自己这么做是有理由的。在第二次战斗中，只有塞特化身成河马，而荷鲁斯从船上用鱼叉刺他，这会使我们想起国王作为秩序一方击败混沌势力的传统景象，就像图坦卡蒙的持鱼叉小雕像（图6）一样。从故事的这一点来看，荷鲁斯要求当国王的主张显然是正当的。

这一篇文本引人关注的兴趣点是如此之多，以至于几乎所有的神话书都会以该文为内容。《争斗》可以单独成为一个有趣的传说故事，但如果把它看作埃及神话整体中的一部分的话，其意义就更加丰富了。埃及神话的一个特点就是各个事件环环相扣。在下一章中，我们将看到这些神话如何相互作用，仅仅一个形象又如何能够代表所有复杂的神话。

第八章

天空之眼：双元性与连续性

太阳崇拜和奥西里斯崇拜是埃及宗教中的两个最重要的内容，它们被集中体现在一个形象中，这就是“神圣之眼”。国王被埋葬时都要带上一对对的神圣之眼手镯。贵族木乃伊的尸体切口上也常常覆盖着一个金属圆盘，上面有一只神圣的眼。不论生前死后，普通人都佩戴着神圣之眼护身符，如图 8 所示。神圣之眼还从埃及传播到其他文化中，是今天古埃及最有名的象征符号之一，它的一种形式就被美国药剂师协会用作代表其职业的标志。

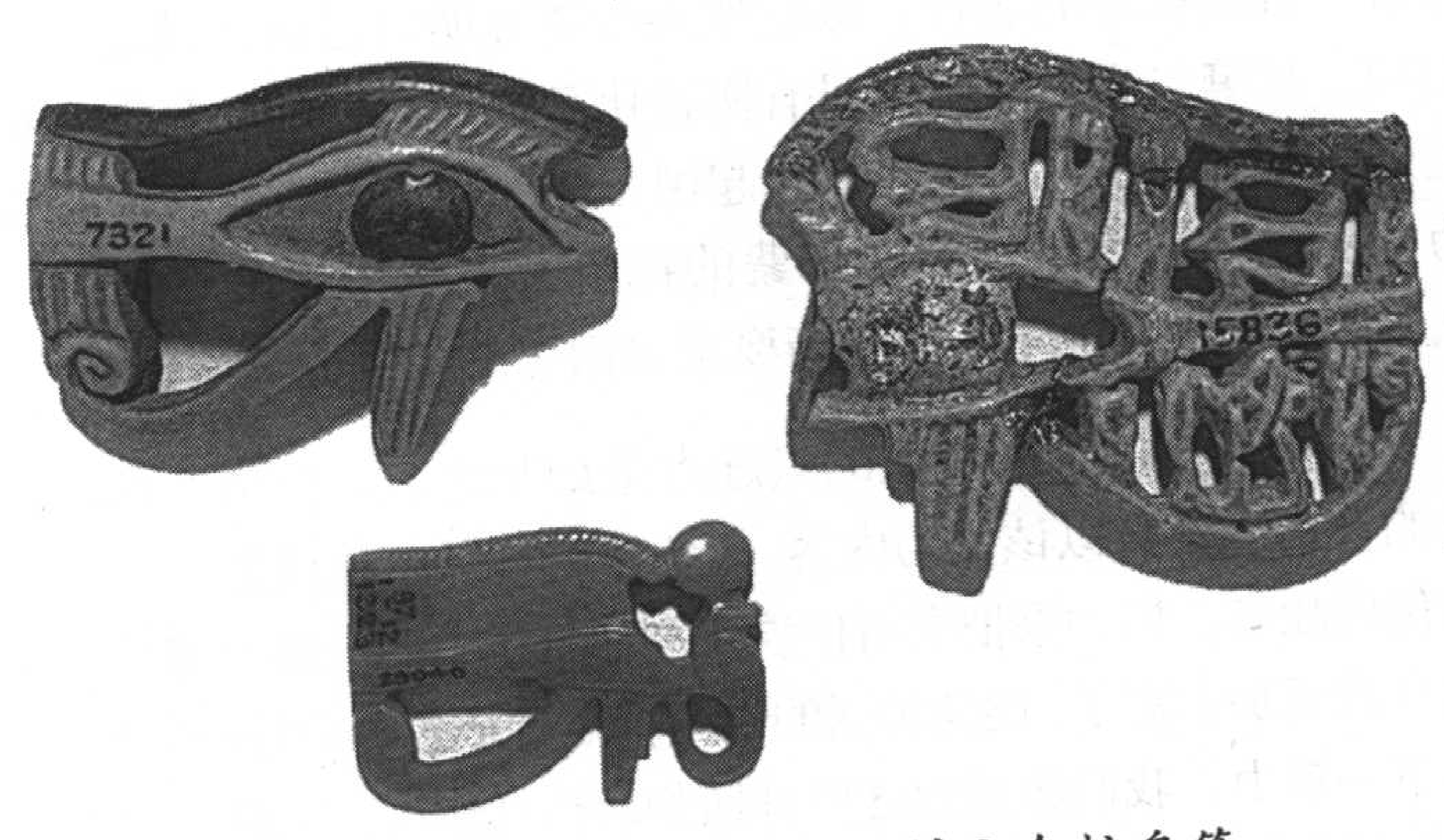


图 8. 代表月亮和太阳之眼的 3 个护身符

天空中的眼睛

神圣之眼结合了人眼的元素和猎鹰的斑纹，它常常被认为是猎鹰神“荷鲁斯之眼”。阅读至此的读者们即使听说事情远非如此简单，他们也不会感到惊讶。在一开始，荷鲁斯不止有一只眼睛，当他被视为宇宙生物的时候，他的右眼就相当于太阳或晨星，左眼相当于月亮或昏星。太阳圆盘也被尊奉为拉神在世界上的积极力量，也就是天空中可以洞察一切的眼睛。

许多埃及的女神，泰富努特、哈托尔、穆特、塞克美特和巴斯梯特，都可以扮演“保护其父亲拉的拉神之眼”的角色。如同荷鲁斯之眼一样，拉神之眼可以单独起作用，并拥有它自己的神话故事。当拉神之眼回到她父亲拉神身边的时候，拉神把她放在自己的前额上，作为可以击败敌人的喷火的眼镜蛇。她也就是我们在索贝克－拉和阿蒙霍泰普三世的王冠上（图 3）以及在图坦卡蒙的王冠上（图 6）所看到的眼镜蛇。

荷鲁斯之眼与拉神之眼都可以被表现成一个神圣之眼，有时还可以辨认出一个神圣之眼护身符到底是太阳之眼还是月亮之眼，这要看这个眼睛到底是面向左面还是右面，或者根据它所使用的材质，或是根据加在眼睛上的细部特征。图 8 中位于中央的护身符就显然是太阳之眼，因为它是由鲜艳的红玛瑙制成，并包含了一条头戴太阳圆盘王冠的眼镜蛇的形象，它们是拉神之眼的两种形式。

月亮荷鲁斯之眼作为护身符，主要代表着治愈和完整无缺；而太阳拉神之眼则代表权力与保护。在有些情况下，这两方面的性能可能都需要，例如神圣之眼护身符放在木乃伊上是为了使它保持完整，同时也保护它免遭有害势力的伤害。这些简单的意义来自于许多神话，这些神话后来逐渐形成更紧密、

更复杂的联系。由于人们的性情不同，因此他们对埃及神话的连续性特点的态度也有所不同，或为之着迷或对之愤怒，那些持愤怒态度的读者就可以跳过本章后面的内容了。

创造神话的方法

埃及神话并不都产生于埃及历史的早期，然后一成不变地延续下来。神话创造是一个连续的进程，一定有一些被普遍理解的准则辖制着这个进程，就像宗教艺术的创造也有普遍的规则一样。把最初多样化的元素聚拢在一起的重要方法是“词汇连接”以及把神按家族归类。我们已经在第四章见识过这些方法，它们把创世神话并入《孟斐斯神学》之中。通过调和汇总，最初仅仅属于一位神的神话可以被转移给它们的神圣“伙伴”，就好像拉神与索贝克那样。

变化与发展的第四种途径是发明或改造一个神话素，使它能够与一个已有的神话素构成一对，或者能够适合一系列已有的平行事件。这使得神话可以被专门创造出来以满足公众或私人的不同需要，一个例子就是我们在第七章看到的基于神话素“女神使已死的男神勃起”的一组关联事件。另一个例子是几个神圣孩童从创世时代到有史时期的接连诞生。太阳孩童诞生自原初莲花，为原初母牛保护；小荷鲁斯出生于齐米斯的芦苇丛中，为沼泽中的野牛保护；像阿蒙霍泰普三世这样的统治者的出生过程都有神的参与，并被表现为由母牛女神喂养。

在太阳每日的循环中，太阳被想成是一个孩子每天早上从原初之水中出现或是诞生给母牛女神。太阳孩童从早期起就是一个重要的概念，但与它相对的同样诞生自莲花的月亮孩童的概念则似乎直到新王国末期才被引入。这种重复并不只是一个文学手法，它反映了埃及的智者思考时间与因果律的方法。

历史的自我重复

一篇埃及文本记载说“一切的存在都是永恒的稳定和永恒的循环往复。”然而矛盾的是，稳定却要通过规律性的变化或转化来获得。例如，王权是神界秩序的一个永恒的组成部分，但它要通过老国王死去变成奥西里斯而新国王取代他的位置成为荷鲁斯这样一个循环反复的模式才能实现，像谋杀、背叛等可怕的事件都是这个模式的一部分，因为混沌会不断地出现，但这些骇人事件可以通过使世界获得新生的积极的转化来达到平衡。比如在“梅特涅石碑”上，神圣孩童不断遭遇威胁，但他总能死里逃生，打败秩序的敌人。

时间既可以被想成是直线般一直回溯到“第一时间”，也可以转圈循环，关键性事件在其间以每小时、每日、每月或者每年这样的循环不断地重复自己。《孟斐斯神学》这样的埃及创世神话文本就像造物主的个人时间表。最人性化的神话叙述属于一个遥远的时代，那时世界由一组神直接统治，由于这些神话叙述的背景都被置于过去，因此它们对于现在的影响就有限。当相似事件在基于循环时间的作品中反复出现时，它们主要是通过图画以及神“组”的聚集来表现。如果把太阳循环变成一个过分人性或过分详尽的故事，那么就会破坏这个循环的“永恒循环往复”的能力，而且宇宙的整个运转也会随之受到损坏。然而，我们有可能观察到太阳循环与埃及神话的其他元素之间漫长、缓慢的关联架构过程，而且再对几个双元性和连续性的例子的分析将使我们更清楚地看清这个过程。

双元性的神话素

我列出了 8 对神话素，它们都与神圣之眼或与这些眼睛关联的神的身体相关（参见背景知识 10）。把这几对神话素看成

是某一个神话的不同版本是不准确的，因为所发生的事并不是按非此即彼的方式发生，而是两种方式兼而有之。

所有未来事件的发生模式都被置于“第一时间”——宇宙被创造出来的时期，因此这几对神话素常常都包含着两个事件，一个发生在“第一时间”，一个发生在神统治世界期间（参见组 1—2）。在其他组中，通常都有一个事件以直线型时间顺序发生，而另一个以循环型时间顺序（例如组 7）发生。在每日的太阳循环中，黎明就等同于“第一时间”，夜晚等同于神话历史的末尾，造物主在那时回归混沌。被置于神话史上早期的事件似乎常常创作于埃及文化史的非常晚的时期，因为公元前 1 千纪是埃及人对“第一时间”以及之前的混沌时期最感兴趣的时期。

有两类主要的双元性神话素，分别是对称的与不对称的。当这些神话被剥离得只剩下基本要素的时候，对称型神话就是内容相同唯有主角不同的神话，例如，“神丢失眼睛后又找了回来”这样的故事概要可以同时用在拉神和荷鲁斯的身上（组 3）。在不对称型的神话中，至少有一个元素是相反的，因此拉神之眼既可以是创造人类的工具也可以成为毁灭人类的工具（组 1）。各组中的每一个神话都因对另一个神话的了解而变得更加丰富。由于荷鲁斯那能赋予生命的眼睛曾经丢失后又找回，因此他作为太阳神化身的地位就清楚了。人类起源于愤怒和悲痛的眼泪，这预示了人类最终的命运。

一旦一对神话被创作出来，这两个神话之间就经常会有意象或角色的转换。很早以来，负责安抚、调解的神图特就被说成是归还了荷鲁斯之眼的神祇。在关于“遥远女神”回归的最初的神话中，将她带回的神似乎是奥努里斯 (Onuris) 或者奥努里斯－舒 (Onuris-Shu)。但当这位女神被等同于拉神之眼后，

背景知识 10

8 组眼睛神话

1

人类起源于拉－阿图姆之眼的眼泪

人类毁灭于拉神之眼

2

拉神之眼从原初之水中找回舒（和泰富努特）

舒神从遥远沙漠中找回拉神之眼（哈托尔－泰富努特）

3

拉神丢失了他的眼睛，后又失而复得

荷鲁斯丢失了他的眼睛，后又失而复得

4

图特（或舒神）治愈并归还了荷鲁斯丢失的眼睛

舒神（或图特）改造并归还了拉神迷失了的眼睛

5

拉神之眼回归后，拉神恢复活力

荷鲁斯之眼出现，奥西里斯获得新生

6

塞特化身为黑色野猪，吞掉了荷鲁斯之眼（月亮）

“母猪”努特吞掉了太阳圆盘（拉神之眼）

7

塞特“诞生”出太阳和月亮圆盘

努特诞生出早晨的太阳

8

塞特抠出荷鲁斯的一只眼睛或者是双眼

荷鲁斯扯下塞特的睾丸

对称性就要求图特神成为她的首要安抚者，据说图特化身成狒狒接近并安抚了愤怒的女神。到了中王国末期，狒狒持着一个神圣之眼的形象就可以代表这两个双元性神话素的一个或全部。后来，舒神有时仍被称为是从塞特手中要回荷鲁斯之眼的神。

图特的狒狒形象与他作为月亮神的角色有相当密切的关系。装饰有一小群猴子或狒狒的神圣之眼护身符（例如图 8 中的右图）可以反映出它是月亮之眼的性质，以及（或者）眼睛女神由化身成狒狒的神护送回埃及并得到猴子以及其他动物欢迎的故事情节。猿猴形成了与传统图画之间更进一步的视觉联系，传统图画就是指狒狒拜日（见图 2a）。当丢失的眼睛回来之后，奥西里斯死而复活，太阳升起驱散了黑暗。

并行的事件

相同的神话素可以是几对双元性神话或者连续性神话的一部分，其重点将根据其他已经存在的元素发生变化。例如，图特把眼睛女神归还给拉神这一事件可以与图特带着拉神性情温和的女儿玛阿特加入太阳神这个事件相对应；玛阿特被引见给拉神这一事件也可以等同于把荷鲁斯之眼呈现给奥西里斯这个事件。在上述两种情况下，神都接受了某种必需的东西以便发挥作用，这种文学创作呼应了王室珠宝等艺术创作中象征符号的不同运用。

“神丢失眼睛又失而复得”的双元性神话素也可以构成一长串神肢体毁损事件的一部分（参见背景知识 11）。肢体残缺对于埃及人来说是一个特别悲惨的遭遇，因为砍头或是被肢解都被认为会限制他在来世的能力，惩罚死者并使他不再为非作歹的一般做法就是破坏他坟墓中雕像的眼睛或是把墓中壁画上他的脸部涂抹掉。

背景知识 11

一系列神肢体毁损的事件

塞特肢解了奥西里斯的身体——伊西丝和阿努比斯修复了奥西里斯的身体

塞特抠出了荷鲁斯的眼睛——图特恢复了荷鲁斯的眼睛

塞特抠出了荷鲁斯的双眼——哈托尔或伊西丝恢复了荷鲁斯的双眼

荷鲁斯扯掉了塞特的睾丸——图特修复了塞特的睾丸

荷鲁斯砍下了伊西丝的头——图特给伊西丝一个牛头

伊西丝砍掉了荷鲁斯的手／双手——伊西丝给他做了新的手，或索贝克恢复了荷鲁斯的手

荷鲁斯、阿努比斯或者伊西丝阉割并肢解了塞特

塞特、荷鲁斯以及其他神毁损了阿波斐斯以及拉神敌人的身体

埃及神话中最著名的肢体残缺事件就是荷鲁斯的一只眼睛或双眼受到伤害，因此荷鲁斯有时被尊奉为两个神，长着眼睛的仁慈的荷鲁斯和失去眼睛的想要复仇的荷鲁斯。像其他不吉利的可怕事件一样，荷鲁斯的肢体残缺也从未在艺术作品中直接表现，在文学作品中也很少有详细的描写。塞特似乎一直被认为是伤害荷鲁斯的罪魁祸首，有时他被说成是用手指毁损或挖出了荷鲁斯的眼珠。在《争斗》中，塞特挖出了荷鲁斯的双眼，并把它们埋在了一个隐秘之地。也有些

故事称塞特吞下了荷鲁斯的眼睛。在少数几个文本里，荷鲁斯的眼睛似乎迷失在了黑暗的原初海洋之中，这个情节可能是借用了拉－阿图姆丢失了的眼睛的双元性神话。丢掉了神圣之眼就等于丢掉了光明与希望，使得世界陷入了绝望与黑暗之中。

可以肯定的是，荷鲁斯的眼睛不只是丢失了，而且被撕裂成许多碎块。在神庙所使用的太阴历中，荷鲁斯眼睛的丢失与复明就相当于月亮的亏缺与盈满。人们通常认为是图特神把荷鲁斯眼睛的碎块拼在了一起，但其中的一块一直未能找到。通过图特的巫术，荷鲁斯受伤的眼睛变成了 *wedjat*（完整或健康的眼睛）。神圣之眼的各个部分可以用于圣书体象形文字中表示分数，如瞳孔表示 1/4，眉毛表示 1/8，等等。眼睛的组成部分总共是 63/64，其中缺失的部分由图特用巫术补出。这些眼睛的组成部分最常见的用途是称量谷物，或者用在处方中指药物相应的比例。

从某个角度讲，奥西里斯死后身体被肢解的故事似乎是被改编的，目的在于使之与荷鲁斯的眼睛的遭遇更加相似。在最初的故事中，伊西丝不得不寻找奥西里斯被分解了的身体，然后用她的巫术将之复原。后来又产生了新的说法，称塞特把奥西里斯的身体撕成碎块并把它们分散到各地。最终就像我们在第五章中所读到的，埃及 42 个诺姆中的每一个诺姆都有奥西里斯的一部分身体。伊西丝收集起这些身体碎块，还使用巫术造出一个替代品代替那个无法找到的碎块。

荷鲁斯完整无缺的眼睛拥有治愈病者、赠予王权、使死者再度变完整的能力；奥西里斯完整无缺的身体被认为可使尼罗河水泛滥、庄稼生长。荷鲁斯与奥西里斯的身体残缺似乎使他们的力量大增，甚至伊西丝被砍头的事件都产生了积极的结

果——她在有了新的母牛头之后获得了母牛女神的力量。这些肢体残缺的故事似乎是太阳神每日在天上地下巡游时所经历的自主变形的一个暴力版本。

有关塞特肢体残缺的故事与上述故事有很大不同。在最早的史料中（塞特和荷鲁斯那时一般被认为是兄弟而非叔侄），有两对可赐予生命的圆形物体被毁损，分别是荷鲁斯的眼睛和塞特的睾丸，而图特为了维持均衡必须要把这二者的伤都治愈。然后最强大的神塞特就会加入持鱼叉者荷鲁斯、拉神之眼以及许多其他好战的神的队伍里，共同击败并肢解了终极敌人混沌巨蛇阿波斐斯。这个故事与把肢体残缺作为最终的有益转变的模式相一致。后来的史料通常写塞特被肢解是为了惩罚他的罪过，而且他最终也没有被治愈或是复原。

《尤米尔哈克纸草》记录了几个有关荷鲁斯的眼睛以及奥西里斯的身体被留在豺诺姆的故事。在其中的一个故事中，塞特由于想要破坏奥西里斯的身体而受到阿努比斯神的惩罚。塞特的肉被烘烤，香味甚至传到天上的拉神那里。赛特豹化身的皮被剥下、烙上印记后做成斗篷穿在阿努比斯的身上，这个神话为祭司在葬礼仪式上穿着豹皮斗篷这个传统提供了一种解释。到了希腊罗马时期，人们认为塞特在战败后身体被分解成许多块，42 个诺姆中的每一个诺姆都埋着他的一部分身体，构成了奥西里斯身体各部分的负面对应物。

民间传说

埃及的一些民间传说中也常常有肢体残缺的主题。在一个新王国时期的故事中，一个弟弟嫉妒他的同胞哥哥，就如同塞特嫉妒奥西里斯一样。这两兄弟分别叫做玛阿特 (Maat) 和格莱格 (Gereg)，通常被译作“真理”和“谎言”。“谎言”诬告他的哥哥偷了一把子虚乌有的匕首，然后让“九神团”惩罚“真

理”，弄瞎他的眼睛。在“真理”失明之后，“谎言”又吩咐他的奴仆把“真理”扔到狮群中，想让狮子将他撕成碎块，但狮子没有伤害“真理”，反而把他放到一片芦苇丛中。“真理”在那里被一位富有女子的奴仆发现，这个女子和“真理”发生了性关系，然后怀上了一个“如同神子一般的”儿子。当“真理”的儿子长大后，他设计让“谎言”说出他自己曾经犯下的罪行，就像《争斗》中塞特被引诱说出罪行一样。于是“谎言”遭受了惩罚，身上负有5处伤。这5处伤似乎是指他的双耳和鼻子被割掉、双眼被损毁，这种惩罚实际上都是在新王国时期用在贪污腐败的官员身上的刑罚。

另一个新王国时期的故事也描绘了两个同胞兄弟相争的故事，哥哥名叫安普（Anpu，阿努比斯）、弟弟被叫做巴塔（Bata），巴塔也是一个神的名字，这个神有时就等同于塞特。在《两兄弟的故事》中，巴塔被诬告强暴了他的嫂子，于是他割掉了自己的阴茎。然后“九神团”为巴塔造了一个配偶，但她背叛巴塔嫁给了埃及的一位国王。巴塔的不同化身都经历了一系列的死亡事件：包含有他心脏的花朵被摧毁，他的牛化身被宰杀并吃掉，他的树化身被砍伐并制成家具。最终巴塔转世为他前妻的儿子，两兄弟达成和解，正义的王权得到重建。

《真理与谎言》和《两兄弟的故事》可能不应该被视为假冒的或是被篡改了的神话，而应被视为这样一些神话故事，在这些故事中神话事件反复出现的模式通过人或半人的角色被表现出来。通过宗教仪式与巫术，现实生活中的埃及人的今生与来世也可以遵循神话事件的规律，本书的最后两章将探究埃及人如何实现上述愿望。

第九章

个人的神话：神话与民间宗教

神话从根本上讲是群体叙事而非个体叙事，它反映的是整个文化的价值取向而不是某个个人的观点。拥有特权的个人也许可以虚构或者修改神话，但这些活动通常都是匿名进行的。神话经常会与对整个共同体或其领袖有益的宗教仪式联系在一起，正如对荷鲁斯与塞特的斗争的反复表演就是为了赋予王权合法性。在古代埃及，神话也可以以非常私人的方式来应用，从而改变个人的生活。

人们在宗教仪式上把生病的或者需要保护的人等同于拥有同样遭遇的神祇，医治者和 *saw*（保护者）为达到特定的目的增添神话的情节，他们将标准版本的人物角色与背景环境相结合，比如“一个小神祇被毒害”或者“一个神为报答力量之语而给予医治”。通过这些咒语，个体的伤病被转移到秩序与混沌之战的战事之中。一些书面咒文只使用了神话的梗概，而在另一些咒文中神话因生动的细节和充满感情的对话描写而变得有血有肉。一些咒文还以视觉艺术的形式表现出来，其中的一个例子就是公元前 18 世纪在底比斯制造的一个河马长牙魔杖，现今保存于大英博物馆（图 9)。这个魔杖上的图画和文字把太阳神话与一个特定人物相关联，她就是“房屋中的女士”塞涅波（Seneb)。这种类型的魔杖是魔法防御体系中易受攻击者的武器。

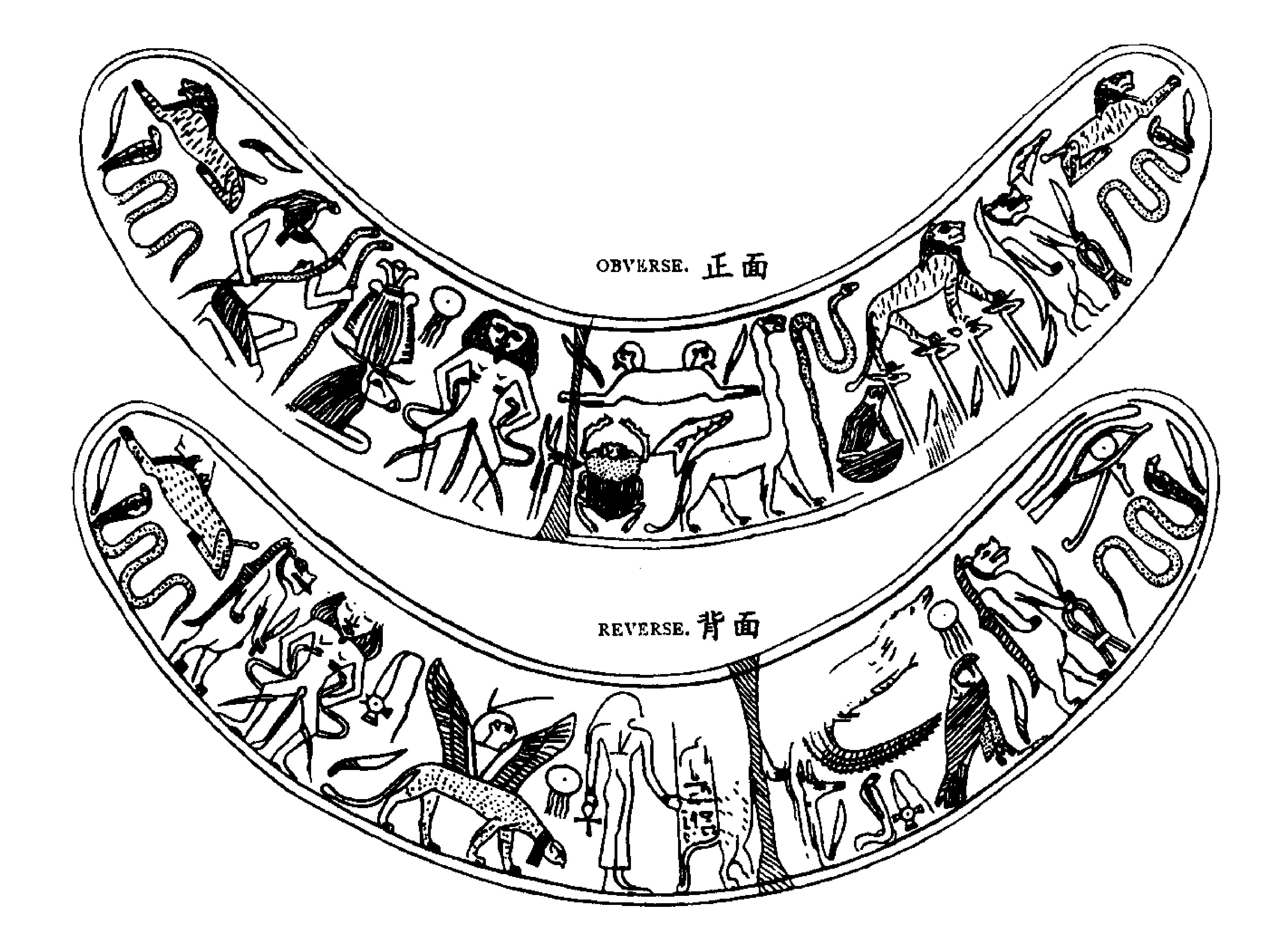


图9.“房屋中的女士”塞涅波的河马长牙防护魔杖

魔法武器

避邪魔杖或魔法匕首等物品通常都是用河马的长牙雕刻而成，这种原材料被认为会使这些物品蕴含着力量。塞涅波的魔杖为弧形，过去是用来猎杀或惊吓野鸟的武器，因为埃及人认为野鸟属于混沌生物。避邪魔杖上雕刻着面目狰狞、挥舞着匕首或火把的人物形象，刻写铭文的模板称这些人物为神、战士或是保护者，一段铭文记载说他们日夜都在尽守保卫的职责。几乎所有的雕刻魔杖都是为妇女和儿童准备的，阿拜多斯最近出土的诞生石上也雕刻着同样的人物形象。埃及的妇女都非常害怕在分娩时死去，而且当时婴儿的死亡率也非常高，因此这种魔杖的首要功能就是保护怀孕或哺乳期的妇女及其孩子免受恶魔、鬼怪和邪恶巫师等敌对势力的伤害。

根据魔杖的磨损以及修补的程度来判断，一些魔杖曾被多次使用，为生者召唤保护者；而另一些魔杖则被置于坟墓之中，以在来世发挥保护作用并帮助死者的灵魂重生。塞涅波的魔杖在开始似乎只有普通的实用功能，直到魔杖上一个人物的上方被加刻上了一段铭文，这个魔杖才对她具有了保护作用（背面正中）。

塞涅波魔杖上的许多图画，比如太阳圆盘、太阳之眼、圣甲虫(黎明神)、带斑纹的天界狮子以及把守冥界出入口的双重斯芬克斯，都与太阳神在经历穿越黑暗王国的危险旅程之后的重生相关联。我们在第八章中已经看到，有一系列神话都与太阳孩童、他的神圣母亲以及那些帮助他们母子摆脱邪恶势力的神祇们相关。“拉神的敌人”在魔杖上只表现为几个头颅、被捆绑着的俘虏或正被矮狮阿哈(Aha，后来被称为贝斯 [Bes])等战斗神刺、咬或碾压的毒蛇。同样的创作原则也体现在“梅特涅石碑”上，石碑上的小荷鲁斯正在扼死或踩踏对他有威胁的危险生物(图 2a)。

塞涅波魔杖接近中心的位置(背面)上的女性形象显然是一个女神，因为她拿着一个“安可”，有可能使用了一段口头咒语使塞涅波暂时等同于这位女神。在中王国时期，为减轻妇女分娩时的痛苦，医生或产婆必须要重复3遍咒语“现在正在分娩的是哈托尔”。在阿拜多斯出土的诞生石上，凡人母亲长着女神的湖蓝色的头发。跟国王一样，塞涅波也可以成为神话事件的重复模式的一部分，她的地位形成了神界与人界之间暂时的联系，这使得超自然的力量可以为凡间的母亲与婴儿而战，就如同他们为神界的母亲与孩子作战一样。孩子的出生与宇宙在每日日出时的重生相关联。通过魔杖上的图画，宇宙的命运与塞涅波的命运连在了一起。

图画和故事

虽然塞涅波魔杖比“梅特涅石碑”要早大约1,400年，但它们上面有许多共同的保护神，比如狮子神、河马女神和青蛙女神(比较图2a–2b与图9)。除此之外，“梅特涅石碑”上还有对于具体的神圣母子——伊西丝与荷鲁斯的叙述。在这些雕刻在石碑上的神话传说中，伟大的女神伊西丝经历了一位普通埃及女人也要经历的困难：她被一个暴虐的亲戚欺负，剥夺了财产，力图在一个男性占统治地位的社会体系中获取正义。在其中一个故事里，伊西丝向距离她最近的村庄里的女性寻求帮助。这样的故事很可能是由村庄里的讲故事者讲述的，其目的肯定是为了吸引女性听众。

河马长牙魔杖上的文本都很短，但一些图画可能代表了某些特定的神话素。一只狒狒持着一个神圣之眼，这是众多魔杖上常见的一幅画面，就像我们在第八章中看到的那样，这个画面代表图特把已经复明了的月亮之眼归还给荷鲁斯，或把已被抚慰了的太阳之眼归还给拉神。许多魔杖都表现了可能代表“大

猫”的猫科动物，传说“大猫”在赫利奥波里斯的一棵树下杀死了混沌怪兽阿波斐斯，或是杀死了正在四处流浪、处于狂乱状态的眼睛女神。在一些魔杖上有猫或狮子吞吃外国人的残忍画面，这可能暗指眼睛女神被拉神派去摧毁人类中邪恶群体的神话。

讲述这些“斗士”神祇的故事的活动似乎是具有保护功能的宗教仪式的一部分，魔杖就在这些宗教仪式上使用。需要保护的妇女和儿童如果了解可保护他们的神灵的一些情况的话，似乎会感觉更加安全。在埃及历史上的大多数时间里，这种“老婆婆传说”都被视为地位很低的神话，因此都没有书面的记载。这也就是为何矮人神贝斯、河马女神塔瓦莱特（Taweret）的图画在日常用品上经常出现，但在埃及文学中却很少记载的原因。我们很难估计有多少普通埃及人了解神话，因为宗教艺术和语言都处于国家的控制之下。

民间宗教

埃及建筑和物品上表现的内容有严格的规定，即使是私人的建筑和物品也不能违背这些规定，但随着时间的推移，这些规定也逐渐变得不那么严格了。在公元前3千纪期间，神可以与国王一同出现，但几乎从未与更低等级的人在一起。旧王国的坟墓中装饰有许多表现日常生活场景的图画，但在供奉神的神庙中很少出现人的画面。然而，旧王国时期埃及人的名字经常会与神的名字结合在一起（比如尼斐尔－塞舍姆－拉 [Nefer-seshem-Ra]，意为“拉神的品行是美丽的”），陵墓里的铭文表明许多贵族男女在神庙中做兼职的祭司（女祭司）。

在中王国时期，同样兼任高级祭司的地方长官也在他们陵墓的壁画上绘制表现宗教节庆的图画，但其中涉及的神祇都只用神圣的物品来指代。这个时期在一些贵族墓葬里使用的《石

棺铭文》(例子参见图 5)形成了埃及神话的一大主要史料。在中王国后期以及第二中间期，神的图画开始出现在贵重的私人物品上，比如棺材、献祭的石碑以及河马长牙魔杖。塞涅波魔杖尤其耐人寻味，因为它很像一部已简化为两组图画的王室《阴间地府书》。

到了新王国时期，将生者绘制成向神的雕像或神圣的动物献祭的样子，以及将死者表现为冥界诸神的模样的做法已为人们普遍接受。在埃及的多神教中，每个人不论年龄、性别、地位或职业怎样，都能够找到一张似乎与自己相关的神祇的脸孔。埃及的智者不断寻找表现造物主与许多其他神之间关系的表达方式，但在大多数时间里，只信仰一个神似乎也并不被认为在精神上更崇高。理想而虔诚的埃及人追随伦理法则“玛阿特”，并尽可能尊奉更多的神，向他们献祭、参加节庆活动、做兼职的男祭司或女祭司、参加神殿的修复或建造工作。

戴尔美迪纳的神话

我们有关民间宗教的许多知识都来自于新王国的戴尔美迪纳——建造王室陵墓的工匠们的村庄。这个村子的成员有着非常高的识字率，比较富有的村民拥有自己的神话故事，例如《荷鲁斯与塞特之间的争斗》(图 7)。一些村民绘制的图画似乎讲述了寓言故事，其中的主角是动物，这些图画比这些寓言已知最早的文字版本还要早几百年。

戴尔美迪纳的人们通过建造王室陵墓而熟悉了描述太阳神神秘旅程的“秘密的”《阴间地府书》的内容，而且他们把这方面的知识应用到实践中。在工匠们的工作生活中，被蛇咬到或者被蝎子螫到都是非常危险的，因此“拉神夜晚之船”摆脱阿波斐斯巨蛇进攻的壮丽神话图画就被用在书面咒文中以对付这种危险。在戴尔美迪纳发现的最详尽的防毒蛇的咒文包括《拉

神的秘密名字》这篇故事，它讲述了伊西丝给太阳神下毒并使诡计诱骗他交出了隐藏于他真实名字中的能力。

戴尔美迪纳还使用以神话为基础的历法，这种历法似乎由神庙历法改编而来，但它们有类似的占星功能，根据人们所相信的神话事件发生的日期来推断这些日期或某一日期中的时刻吉利不吉利。根据《开罗历》，埃赫特(Akhet，泛滥季节)第一个月的第二十二日基本上是不吉利的日子，因为这一天是荷鲁斯与塞特交战、伊西丝用鱼叉刺塞特、荷鲁斯对他的母亲发怒的日子，这些都是在《争斗》中详细描述过的事件。埃赫特的第三个月的第二十六日则是吉日，荷鲁斯和塞特在这一天和解，黑土地给了荷鲁斯而红土地则给了塞特。

一些历法中的预言具体得惊人。《萨利埃纸草四号》中描述“九神团”被创造（通过阿图姆的性能力）之日的条目就警告说那一天出生的人会在性交时死去。然而，戴尔美迪纳的工匠们并没有过于认真地对待这个历法，否则王室的陵墓永远不可能修建完成，他们可能只是把这些历法作为一个指导，来看何时采取巫术防卫措施，比如佩戴有防护作用的护身符。

历法中的一个警告是不要在“拉神安抚塞克美特”的节日里出门旅行，这暗指拉神在把他的眼睛化身成狮子女神塞克美特并派她去摧毁人类之后又改变主意的故事。另一个大致涉及此神话的故事出现在由一位名叫尼斐尔阿布(Neferabu)的绘图员奉献的石碑上，这位工匠于公元前13世纪在戴尔美迪纳工作。石碑类型是已知的忏悔石碑的一种，忏悔石碑的得名是由于碑上所刻的铭文都是请求神祇宽恕的祷文。在铭文中，尼斐尔阿布承认了他自己由于无知和愚蠢而无法辨别是非，因而对一位名叫美列特塞格尔(Meretseger)的地方性眼镜蛇女神犯下了罪行（未详细说明），女神惩罚了他，使他遭受了如同妇女分娩

时的剧痛一样的痛苦。尼斐尔阿布警告其他人美列特塞格尔会像凶猛的狮子一样袭击有罪的人，而她也可以通过祈祷和献祭来获得安抚。作为个人，尼斐尔阿布将自己置于应受惩罚的有罪之人当中，但就像在神话里所表现的那样，造物主富有怜悯之心，复仇的狮子女神被转换成一位亲切的女神，如同“热天里一缕清新的微风”那般受人欢迎。

护身符和青铜制品

希腊人和罗马人经常用神话的场景来装饰世俗的物品，而大多数埃及的艺术具有宗教或巫术的功能，但神话的主题却很少被采用。在第三中间期，反映神话主题的非王室物品在数量上和类别上都有很大的增长，这种变化所发生的时间正是祭司阶层尤为强大而埃及国家不再统一于强大王权之下的时期，这两方面的变化同时发生恐怕不能只用巧合来解释。

在这一时期，大地与天空分离等神话场景开始出现在私人的墓葬纸草和棺材上。神祇形态的护身符变得越来越普遍，最精致的神圣之眼护身符就出现在这个时期（如图 8 所示）。一些护身符的图案，比如荷鲁斯手持鱼叉、伊西丝和小荷鲁斯藏身于纸莎草丛中，所描绘的都是来自于神话的场景。为定居于三角洲的一位利比亚酋长制作的一个挂件表现了太阳神与其女儿哈托尔和玛阿特一同在日间太阳船上的情景。一篇铭文将太阳神命名为“阿蒙－拉－荷拉赫特”，铭文称他在天空中巡游以保护舍斯洪克（Sheshonq）。伟大的太阳周期性的循环被看作是为了救一人之命而发生的，就好像基督徒被说服相信耶稣基督是为拯救他们每个人而死。

在后埃及和希腊罗马时期，比较富有的人都习惯于向神庙祭献青铜小神像。这些供奉的青铜制品中有一些包含着神话的场景，比如小太阳神从原初莲花中诞生、造物主集合“八神团”

等。这些青铜像的奉献者不大可能选择那些他们一无所知的人物或场景，参加神庙节庆活动是他们了解神话的方法之一，因为在这些活动上会反复表演神话或诵读神话。

神庙和节庆

“梅特涅石碑”和“夏巴卡石碑”提供了两个展示于神庙中的神话文本的范例。刻写在“梅特涅石碑”上的咒文里的故事可能是大声诵读给为被蛇或蝎子咬伤之后到神庙来寻求治疗的人听的；而《孟斐斯神学》中的创世故事则可能要在奠基仪式以及宇宙需要更新的新年节庆上诵读。我们尚不清楚这种诵读活动的公开程度如何。埃及神庙所举办的日常献祭和赞美仪式上并没有民众聚集观看，因为神庙的内区只允许处于宗教意义上的洁净状态的人进入，而要想接近人们认为的神祇所在之地——神的雕像，则只有国王和高等级的男女祭司才能做到。

在重要的节庆期间，神像也可能会放在一个小船模型上，置于神庙建筑中公众可以进入的区域，或者甚至被摆在另一个神庙中。再生神索克尔的节庆活动中会有一个拖着船舶神龛穿过孟斐斯的墓地的项目；而在与农业丰收有关联的米恩神的节庆活动中，神的雕像会被抬到稻田和莴苣地里去。这些节庆活动使当地人有机会接近神祇的物质表现形式，而这种机会是千载难逢的。作为庆典的一部分，似乎经常会有食物和饮品分发到人群中。

位于埃德富的荷鲁斯神庙的墙壁上所刻的图画和铭文已被解释为一部“神秘剧”，其主题是荷鲁斯与塞特之间的斗争，其中的一些情节，如荷鲁斯用鱼叉刺塞特，似乎曾在神庙的湖上表演过，围观的人都可能有角色表演。许多神庙都有庆祝在外游荡的眼睛女神回归埃及的节庆活动，粗画和岩石上的铭文记载着人们进入沙漠帮忙把女神带回家的故事，就像神话中的图特和舒所做的一样。在《人类的毁灭》这个故事中，拉神为

了不让眼睛女神杀掉余下的人类，他用染成血红色的啤酒把女神灌醉，而仿效女神酩酊大醉的状态似乎也是庆祝“醉酒女士”哈托尔的节庆活动的一个重要特征。而在拉神把塞克美特变成哈托尔的节日当天不要出门旅行的警告可能是一个非常明智的警示。

背景知识 12

一些与神话相关的神庙节庆

节庆	神庙	神话
醉酒	穆特神庙，卡纳克；布巴斯梯斯	人类的毁灭
考伊阿克	阿拜多斯等	奥西里斯的死亡与重生
奥帕特	卢克索	手女神和造物主的联合/王室诞生神话
陶工旋盘	埃斯纳	克努姆创造生命
回归	迈达姆德等	“遥远女神”的回归
胜利	埃德富	荷鲁斯对塞特的胜利

一些重要的节庆，如底比斯的“瓦迪美丽节庆”，似乎并没有任何相关联的神话。在这个节庆活动中，阿蒙-拉的太阳船神坛会停靠在河的西岸与“尼克罗波里斯女神”哈托尔会合，为死者带来新生。据《梵蒂尔纸草》中的一个故事记载，一位勇敢的廷臣代替他的国王，志愿进入冥界女王哈托尔的地界。这个故事很可能是根据与此节庆相关的神话改编的，但这个神话本身并没有以故事体的形式流传下来。

在三角洲的布巴斯梯斯，残忍的眼睛／狮子女神在一个节庆中被变成一个仁慈的繁育猫女神。希腊历史学家希罗多德（Herodotus，约公元前484—前420）曾为我们生动地记述了这个节庆活动中的醉酒、奏乐和淫秽笑话等内容。他介绍说：乘船来参加这个节庆的妇女会撩起裙子，向岸边的人展示她们的阴部——这与哈托尔女神在《争斗》中为挑起造物主太阳神的欲望而摆的姿势相同。普通的埃及妇女都非常乐意扮演神话中最重要的女神角色：她是神的伴侣，刺激了创造生命的活动和生命重生的活动。

希罗多德还讲述埃及的农妇们为使庄稼生长，会举着奥西里斯的阴茎模型围着当地的农田列队行进。在埃及的所有节庆活动中，最有影响力的是那些反复演出奥西里斯死亡、埋葬以及重生过程的节庆，因此死亡神话及它在埃及文化中的中心地位就是本书最后一章要讨论的内容。

第十章

木乃伊的祝福：死亡神话

古希腊的文化和神话为各种类型的文学作品提供了灵感，而古埃及则主要为恐怖故事提供了素材。有关木乃伊复活的书籍和电影表现了人们对逝者的普遍恐惧，它们还提供了战胜这种恐惧的安全的方法。一个刻写在陶瓷碎片上的埃及鬼故事(约公元前 1200 年）可能曾被用作一篇咒文的一部分来驱除恼人的鬼怪，它讲述了一位勇敢的高级祭司如何与一个名叫尼布斯迈赫(Nebusemekh)的愤怒鬼共度一夜的故事。这位高级祭司答应为尼布斯迈赫重建他被毁坏了的陵墓，并定期给他的灵魂贡献祭品，从而改变他悲惨的生活。在这个故事中，木乃伊会是我们同情的对象。古埃及的木乃伊通常是死亡与生命、恐惧与希望的象征，这一点最为突出地体现在一类名叫谷物木乃伊的木乃伊模型上。图 10 中的木乃伊是用河里的淤泥制成的，埃及人认为首先是淤泥而非其他东西赐予了埃及生命。

斜躺着的木乃伊象形文字符号被标在表示睡觉和死亡的词语的词尾，表示这两种状态都只是暂时的；而直立着的木乃伊象形文字则可以被用在表示转变、雕像或肖像的词语的词尾。埃及的木乃伊不只是一具保存下来的尸体，它是一个人曾经的形象的转化。给木乃伊涂上芳香的树脂或在木乃伊的脸上覆盖金面具等行为都可以帮助它转变为神。

图 10. 后王朝时期的一个谷物木乃伊

在很多时期，不论男性或女性的木乃伊都被等同于奥西里斯——神话中的木乃伊原型。木乃伊模型具有奥西里斯或另一位代表死亡与重生的鹰头神普塔－索克尔－奥西里斯的特征。我们前面所说的那个后王朝时期的谷物木乃伊的脸是用绿蜡制成的。作为冥界的统治者，奥西里斯的皮肤通常都被表现成绿色或者黑色，这两种颜色后来被认为是代表农业丰收的符号，而最初可能用来表示腐烂物。

在《争斗》这个故事中，奥西里斯指出，即使是天上的星星也会死亡并在死后进入他的王国。《争斗》虽然充满了性和暴力的内容，但并没有触犯禁忌，因为它没有描述所有神话事件中最可怕的事情——奥西里斯被他的兄弟塞特谋杀。塞特想要毁坏或窃取奥西里斯身体的意图可以被详细描写，但导致奥西里斯死去的袭击过程却不能详述。在旧王国时期的《金字塔铭文》中，埃及统治者奥西里斯只被说成是"侧躺着"的，他和他的儿子向神界法庭提起诉讼，法庭宣判奥西里斯在对塞特的控告中是正义的一方，因此奥西里斯"被复活"，但他的命运就只是做冥界的统治者，他的儿子荷鲁斯将成为人间的统治者。正义得到了伸张，但对英年早逝的恐惧却不可否认。在《亡灵书》的一段对话中（咒文 175），奥西里斯哀叹他被迫呆在一个冰冷的世界里，与他的挚爱天人永隔，造物主回应说奥西里斯拥有超越所有生物体的能力就算是得到了补偿。

《孟斐斯神学》记述奥西里斯是溺水而死，但随即又继续说明伊西丝如何从水中捞出他的身体。一篇新王国时期献给众神之王奥西里斯的赞美诗对于他的死讲述得很模糊，只是含糊地说是由于"扰乱者（塞特）的行为"。它集中笔墨说明伊西丝如何找到奥西里斯的身体，如何使他暂时复活以使她怀上荷鲁斯。照这样的想法，奥西里斯的复活就是一次生理的勃起，使他的精子可以开始孕育的过程。这种解释生命再生的性的象

征手法被普遍使用，在一些《阴间地府书》中，太阳的光芒使得善良的死者的木乃伊勃起，谷物木乃伊通常都有勃起的阴茎，像图坦卡蒙这样的显贵死者都会被制成阴茎直立的木乃伊形象。

在希腊作家普鲁塔克（约46—126）有关伊西丝和奥西里斯的作品中，他记载了这样一个传说，称伊西丝未能找到的奥西里斯被肢解后的一部分身体就是他的阴茎，因此她不得不给他做了一个假的。普鲁塔克有关奥西里斯被谋杀的描写在现有资料中是最为详尽的，他描述了嫉妒的泰丰（Typhon，塞特）如何诱骗他的兄弟奥西里斯爬进一个敞开的棺材中，然后他用熔化了的金属密封这个棺材、把它丢进尼罗河中。棺材被冲进地中海，最终在黎巴嫩的毕布罗斯被冲上岸。一棵神奇的树长大并隐藏起了这口棺材，而毕布罗斯的国王让人砍掉这棵树，用来制造自己宫殿中的一根柱子。悲伤的伊西丝循着这口棺材的踪迹来到毕布罗斯，她在宫中找到一份工作，成为了一名理发师兼保姆，这样她就可以接近她遇害的丈夫。最终，伊西丝告诉了国王和王后她的真实身份，因此国王和王后把棺材还给她，让她带回埃及。但棺材回到埃及后被塞特发现，于是他把奥西里斯的身体撕成碎块。

这段叙述在埃及并没有完全类似的文献相对应，普鲁塔克可能是吸收了地方传说和民间故事的素材，例如在赫拉克利奥波里斯，已死的奥西里斯的“巴”（*ba*）被认为是出自于一棵神圣之树。早在中王国时期，人们称索贝克穿越了“伟大的绿色”（地中海）去寻找奥西里斯的遗体。伊西丝屈尊做女仆的情节与“梅特涅石碑”上所刻写的小荷鲁斯的故事中她的境遇非常相似。在所有这些故事中，伊西丝都被描写成经历了痛苦、孤独以及对未来恐惧的女性形象，这与现实生活中的寡妇很相像。这些情感在一些哀悼诗歌中也有所表达。在葬礼和奥西里斯节庆上扮演伊西丝及其姊妹涅菲悌丝的妇女会诵读或吟唱这些诗歌。

葬礼与节庆

在《金字塔铭文》中，已故的国王们像奥西里斯一样“被复活”。这种把自身的命运和奥西里斯的命运等同起来的做法通过贵族阶层得到了传播，直至后来每个死者都可以被认为是“奥西里斯某某”。到了新王国时期，给尸体涂抹芳香油以及葬礼仪式的许多要素都通过语言、姿势或者图画与奥西里斯神话关联起来。据说是阿努比斯把奥西里斯的身体变成了第一具木乃伊，而且这具木乃伊得到了图特魔咒的保护。葬礼纪念碑、棺材或坟墓墙壁上绘制的图景显示了死者由一个长着阿努比斯的豺头的人物服侍，这个人物有时似乎是戴着豺头面具的祭司，有时就被叫做阿努比斯。公元前 4 世纪开始放在墓葬中的《呼吸书》据说是由伊西丝和图特写给奥西里斯使用的。

在送葬的队伍中，死者的儿子或者一位葬礼僧侣会扮演荷鲁斯的角色，给予他父亲在冥界的新生命。给予死者的祭献品等同于复活奥西里斯的荷鲁斯生命之眼。两位哭泣的妇女会为木乃伊守夜并加入送葬的队伍中，她们相当于两姐妹——悼念逝去的丈夫／兄弟的伊西丝和涅菲悌丝。仪式与神话相互间的呼应引起了激烈的争论，焦点在于是这些仪式被设计出来适应已有的神话，还是神话要素的出现是为了解释古老的葬礼习俗。也许有时是神话先出现，有时是葬仪先出现，但争辩双方的支持者都不接受这种中庸的答案，他们之间的争论就像荷鲁斯与塞特的矛盾那样难以调和。

一些埃及人还修建了衣冠冢、葬礼纪念碑，或在大型墓葬以及阿拜多斯的朝圣中心埋入他们自己的木乃伊小雕像，这使得他们的灵魂可以参加每年一次的奥西里斯节庆，在这个节庆活动中，神的死亡以及复活的片断会被反复地表演。中王国时代之前的王室官员在阿拜多斯留下的铭文清楚地表明公众会参

加一个象征性的战斗。一艘载有奥西里斯神像的船舶神龛从他的宫殿（神庙）出发，到达他的“坟墓”之后再返回，这位神沿途会遇到敌人的攻击，而这些敌人随后会受到猛烈的还击。记录公元前1000年类似节庆活动的文本称人们会在这种战斗中受伤甚至死去。

到这一时期，大多数重要神庙都在自己的区域内建有一个奥西里斯的“坟墓”，当地的人们可以把谷物木乃伊或奥西里斯小神像埋在那里的微型墓室中，从而达到献祭的目的。神庙文本描述女神通过制造木乃伊形制的人物形象神奇地帮助奥西里斯复活。像图10所示的真正的谷物木乃伊都是用泥土或沙土制成，里面还混有大麦或二粒小麦的种子。这些木乃伊有时就被埋在沙漠边缘的沟壑中，在山洪爆发或下暴雨的时候，种子得到灌溉然后发芽，生命从死亡之中生成。

至少从中王国时期起，奥西里斯的死亡和重生就与农作物每年的播种和收获这一循环紧密联系在一起，据说大麦是从他肋骨中长出来的，而用蹄子脱谷粒并用背驮谷物的驴子则被辱骂成塞特一派的生物。使用“瓦吉特”眼睛称量谷物与认为庄稼来自于复活后的奥西里斯的身体的观念有关，因为他的身体是通过荷鲁斯之眼的出现复活的。由于谷物制成的面包和大麦酿成的啤酒是所有埃及人最基本的食物，因此奥西里斯的复活对于整个埃及都是至关重要的。

从新王国时期开始，奥西里斯苗床（木头制成神的框架，里面填满土壤）以及谷物木乃伊也被放置于坟墓之中。有时在葬礼上会给这些苗床浇水，这样在坟墓封闭之后种子还可以发芽。这些象征手法有助于把死者纳入一个死亡与重生的大循环中，这个大循环是世界上的每种生物都必须经历的，在这个由造物主创造的循环中，死者被寄以在保持这一大循环方面发挥积极作用的希望。

一次可怕的大冒险

彼得 · 潘(Peter Pan)把死亡描绘成“一次可怕的大冒险”，所有古埃及人一定都能接受他的这个说法。像医生古阿这样的人已经预料到在死后的过渡时期会遇到许多危险，作为一个有钱的上等人，他负担得起装饰有图案并刻着文字的葬仪物品，这些物品可以帮助他化解这些危险。如同神一样，死者也被认为具有各种不同的形态，这样他们可以同时出现在几处场所和几个身体里。当古阿的木乃伊还躺在保护措施周全的棺椁之中的时候，他的像鸟一般的“巴”就已经穿越了“度阿特”。古阿有地图，这使他可以沿着太阳神夜晚旅行的路线（图 5）前进；他还有咒文，使他可以通过守卫的怪兽并说服神圣的摆渡者载他去到他应该到达的地方。

《石棺铭文》等咒文集类似于死后世界的《最坏事件应对指南》，死者害怕他们会干渴饥饿、在黑暗中迷失、遭到毒蛇攻击、被神圣之火烧到、落入怪兽手中并被肢解或者被迫一边倒立行走一边吃屎喝尿。这些生动的假想的恐怖事件大多数都可以通过扮演神话中的角色而加以避免。一个像古阿这样的死者可以声称像图特那样归还荷鲁斯丢失的眼睛，像舒那样支撑天空或是像塞特那样驱赶怪兽阿波斐斯远离太阳船。这种可暂时等同于多个神的多样性被用于赋予死者在特殊场合下应该需要的能力和知识。如同神在他们的神圣旅行中获得成功一样，死者也会在他们的旅行中获得成功。

到新王国时期，更简明紧凑的咒文集，也就是如今被称为《亡灵书》的咒文集，取代了《石棺铭文》。在《亡灵书》中，神界法庭的神裁法占据了重要地位。42 位法官坐在奥西里斯的设有王位的觐见室——“双重玛阿特之堂”中，死者必须要接受这个神界法庭的严格审查，就像奥西里斯和荷鲁斯曾经历过

的那样。在死者宣布他无罪之后，他或她的心脏就要与真理女神玛阿特的一个雕像一起放在天平上称量，善良者被认为是像拉神一样，把玛阿特装在心中。考虑到即使是神在伸张正义时也会遇到重重困难，因此死者被允许使用巫术，一个刻有一篇咒文的圣甲虫可能会被放在木乃伊胸腔的上面或是里面，因为这篇咒文可以阻止心脏讲出任何藏于其中的坏事。理想的裁决是奥西里斯曾经得到的“言辞真理”。如同奥西里斯一样，善良的死者也不能重回他们过去在人世间的生活，他们不得不以新的形象居住在一个新的王国中。

最终的命运

在《石棺铭文》中，死者可能被想象成生活在谷物长得很高大的“苇子的原野”里，他们在那里接受着“祭品之地”的一切美好东西，和图特一同居住在“月亮宫”之中，或者成为伟大的女神哈托尔的随从。《石棺铭文》1130 描述了整个循环过程，从“万物之王”创造世界到最后造物主与“无生命之神”（奥西里斯）融为一体，在结尾处，它承诺任何了解这篇咒文的人都将像冥界的奥西里斯和东方的拉神那样，不被神圣之火伤害。与奥西里斯一同栖息、与拉神一同旅行，这是“无罪的”死者的两大命运。

一个把死者的灵魂与拱极星联系在一起的早期信仰暗示了人们对于进入奥西里斯王国的恐惧，拱极星是那些并不按时落入地平线之下“与奥西里斯一同休息”的星星。在《争斗》故事中，奥西里斯的王廷里挤满了可怕的死亡使者，奥西里斯声称玛阿特已被追来和他居住在一起，因为埃及已腐化堕落。从旧王国到罗马时期，很可能发现一些埃及文本，它们都在强调幸福的来世生活取决于合乎道德的行为，而不是依靠负担得起最为华丽的陵墓和葬仪陈设的能力。

一个可能创作于公元前1千纪的晚期的故事生动地表达了上述理念。故事讲述一位名叫塞特纳（Setna）的王子观看了两个送葬队伍：其中一名死者很富有，他将拥有最好的葬仪陈设；另一名死者则是个穷人，他将被埋到沙漠里，根本没有任何随葬品。塞特纳的儿子用巫术将他的父亲带入冥界，去看看这两个人最终的命运。结果两个人都在奥西里斯的法庭上受到审判：富人被判定在生前邪恶自私，因而将遭受永世的折磨；而穷人在生前则是一个好人，因此他得到了富人所有的随葬品，这帮助他成为追随奥西里斯的被赐福的灵魂。

随着这种来世道德观在民间逐渐受欢迎，奥西里斯和伊西丝在神话中的形象也日渐清晰。奥西里斯发展成为一位好统治者，是无辜的受害者和最终的正义的化身。伊西丝变成了贤妻良母，担负着拯救所有人类的任务，就像她曾经把她的丈夫和儿子从毁灭边缘拯救回来一样。

同一条船上的所有人

奥西里斯、伊西丝和荷鲁斯的神话强调了家庭的忠诚，这也反映了普通的埃及人对于死者的态度。每位死者都是一个潜在的*akh*——理想中的具有半神能力的灵魂。写给死者的信件清楚地表明，这些个体被认为可以与坟墓之外的阳界以及家人保持联系。在《争斗》这个故事中，死去的奥西里斯帮助他的儿子获得了王位，这反映出埃及人期望死去的亲人运用自身的能力和影响力来帮助家庭成员的想法。

背景知识 13

阴间地府书

《金字塔铭文》（公元前 24 世纪之后）、《石棺铭文》（约公元前 22 世纪之后）以及《亡灵书》（公元前 16 世纪之后）是葬礼咒文的不同合集，其中没有任何两部是相同的。带有图解的《阴间地府书》是以太阳神的旅行为中心的完整作品。被复制在王室陵墓、衣冠冢中的墙壁和天花板上的主要的《阴间地府书》包括：

《阿姆度阿特》（Amduat，“冥界中有什么”），公元前 15 世纪或更早
太阳神及其随从人员穿越 12 小时的黑暗。

《拉神的祈祷文》，公元前 15 世纪
太阳神在冥界的 75 种形式的祈祷。

《门之书》，公元前 14 世纪或更早
太阳神、西阿（创造性思想）和海卡（魔法）穿越冥界的 12 道门。

《夜晚与白昼之书》，公元前 14 世纪
太阳神及其随从人员穿越天空女神努特的身体。

《洞窟书》，公元前 13 世纪
太阳神穿越冥界的 12 个洞窟以和奥西里斯会合。

《大地书》，公元前 13 世纪
太阳神在冥界的形态变化。

这些书中的多部后来都被改编使用于非王室的坟墓墙壁、棺材以及葬礼纸草上。一些表现冥界的图画可能影响了早期基督教对于地狱的认识。

另一方面，法老文化也取决于将国王和国家置于家庭忠诚之上的埃及人。在与太阳崇拜有关的葬礼文本中，已故者被视为是更大的埃及社会和神界秩序的一个组成部分。死去的人们被分成“拉神的敌人”和“拉神的杰出灵魂”两部分，其中王室陵墓墙壁上的《阴间地府书》描绘的“拉神的敌人”都是被砍头、烧死或活煮了的形象。

在这些《阴间地府书》中，即使是最强大的国王也只是配角（参见背景知识13），他们死后的命运与在夜晚乘船航行于冥界中的太阳神联系在一起。宇宙的重生要依靠太阳船上的全体人员，这个船也叫“无数人之船”。从中王国时期起，非王室成员的死者也可以成为这条船上的水手，参与做重要的工作——在从黄昏到黎明的过程中驾驶和保卫这艘船，有一些葬礼咒文就是为了“登上拉神之船”以及“成为拉神之船上最敏捷的划船手”。图文并茂的咒文表现了已故者扮演塞特或眼睛女神等强大的神的角色，以杀死威胁太阳船安全的混沌怪兽。来世成为了永远的航行旅程，而且几乎所有的人都在同一条船上。

据说太阳神在穿越冥界时发出的光芒可以把无罪的死者的木乃伊从昏睡状态中唤醒，但不幸的是，光芒只能维持一个小时，而对于死者来说，这显然像是他们在“苇子的原野”中度过的整个一生的时间。人们假设存在着几种执行不同时间表的现实情况。

一些《阴间地府书》展现了拉神和奥西里斯生命和死亡实为一体的这一“秘密知识”。这两个神在夜晚的中点合并，于是死亡和重生的循环再次开始。黎明，这一个美丽的时刻将带来生命的再生，人们用多种多样的物品庆祝着这个时刻，其中有像“克里奥帕特拉尖塔”这样宏伟的方尖碑，也有家庭主妇塞涅波的魔杖。

年表

（公元前 7 世纪之前的所有时间都只是大致时间）

前王朝时期，公元前 5000—前 3200

岩石绘画

定居尼罗河谷

上埃及王权兴起

原王朝时期，公元前 3200—前 3100（第 0 王朝）

象形文字被创造出来

埃及统一，孟斐斯城建立（第 0 王朝）

早王朝时期，公元前 3100—前 2686（第 1—3 王朝）

第一部被连接起来的象形文字文本

旧王国，公元前 2686—前 2181（第 3—6 王朝）

在吉萨和萨卡拉建造巨型的王室金字塔（第 3—4 王朝）

建造太阳神庙（第 5 王朝）

在金字塔内刻写《金字塔铭文》（第 5—6 王朝）

第一中间期，公元前 2181—前 2055（第 7—11 王朝）

埃及分裂成相互敌对的区域

地方贵族的墓葬中使用《石棺铭文》

中王国，公元前2055—前1650（第11—13王朝）

尼布赫帕特拉孟图霍特普[1]重新统一了埃及（第11王朝）

埃及成为近东地区的一个大国（第12王朝）

埃及文学的黄金时代；保存下来的最早的用僧侣体文字书写的故事和“教谕”

关键物：古阿棺、塞涅波魔杖

第二中间期，公元前1650—前1550（第13—17王朝）

埃及在外族入侵之后分裂

《亡灵书》最早的副本（第17王朝）

新王国，公元前1550—前1069（第18—20王朝）

埃及重新统一并在近东地区发展成为一个帝国（第18王朝）

大多数祭祀神庙得到重建。卡纳克的阿蒙神庙兴起（第18—20王朝）

阿玛尔纳时期，阿吞神短时间内取代了所有其他神。图坦卡蒙统治下多神教恢复（第18王朝晚期）

拉美西斯二世长时间的繁荣统治（第19王朝）

《阴间地府书》装饰帝王谷中的王室陵墓（第18—20王朝）

用后埃及语写成的神话以及与神话相关的故事（第19—20王朝）

关键物：克里奥帕特拉尖塔（图特摩斯三世方尖碑）、阿蒙霍泰普三世与索贝克-拉的雕像、图坦卡蒙的持鱼叉小雕像和《彻斯特比提蒲纸本一号》

[1] 尼布赫帕特拉是王位名，孟图霍特普是本名。

第三中间期，公元前1069—前747（第21—25王朝）

埃及频繁分裂

利比亚裔的国王们统治三角洲（第21—23王朝）

与卡纳克高级祭司集团关系密切的王朝统治南部（第21—23王朝）

努比亚的统治者入侵

关键物：神圣之眼护身符

后王朝时期，公元前747—前332（第25—30王朝，第一第二波斯时期）

埃及重新统一于努比亚王朝（第25王朝）

亚述人入侵并赶走努比亚人

来自舍易斯的埃及王朝得到了控制权（第26王朝）

通俗体文字的文学兴盛

波斯人征服埃及

埃及的领袖们为独立而斗争（第27—30王朝）

波斯人再次征服埃及

现存最早的地方神话集

关键物：夏巴卡石碑、谷物木乃伊和梅特涅石碑

希腊罗马时期，公元前332年—公元395（马其顿和托勒密王朝，罗马时期）

波斯帝国被亚历山大大帝征服。亚历山大里亚建立

托勒密将军在亚历山大的帝国分崩离析之后掌握了埃及的控制权

托勒密家族在亚历山大里亚建立统治并重建了许多重要的埃及神庙

神话被刻写在神庙的墙壁上

克里奥帕特拉七世及其儿子恺撒里奥（托勒密十五世）被

奥古斯都打败。埃及成为罗马帝国的一部分(公元前30年)
《赫尔墨斯集》被创作出来
埃及逐渐成为基督教区
科普特语言和文学的发展

拜占庭(科普特)时期,公元395—640年

埃及成为拜占庭帝国的一部分
余下的异教神庙都被关闭
识读象形文字的知识失传
阿拉伯人入侵埃及

阿拉伯时期,公元640年至今